

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 423

EC 307 421

AUTHOR Thurlow, Martha; Vandercook, Terri; Kraljic, Mary McDevitt; Medwetz, Laura; Nelson, Marilyn; Sauer, John; Walz, Lynn

TITLE District Partnership Approach to Inclusion: A Qualitative Evaluation of Impact.

INSTITUTION Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Inst. on Community Integration.; Minnesota State Dept. of Education, St. Paul.

SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 1999-06-00

NOTE 65p.

CONTRACT HC086J20010

AVAILABLE FROM Publications Office, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 109 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Dr., SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Tel: 612-624-4512; Web site: <<http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ici/>> (available in alternative formats).

PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS \*Change Strategies; Cooperative Programs; \*Disabilities; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; Family Involvement; \*Inclusive Schools; Inservice Teacher Education; Mainstreaming; \*Program Evaluation; \*Qualitative Research; Regular and Special Education Relationship; \*School Districts; Surveys

IDENTIFIERS \*Minnesota

## ABSTRACT

This monograph reports on a qualitative evaluation of the Together We're Better (TWB) program, an effort in Minnesota to develop an inclusive, positive, supportive educational system. The TWB project focused on: (1) general education/special education collaboration within the state department of education; (2) district partnerships; (3) personnel preparation/development; (4) staff development training; and (5) family leadership. The qualitative evaluation examined the impact of the program in four school district partners using project processing notes, direct impact data, and survey results. Evaluation focused on awareness, climate, skills, practice, and policy. Specific impacts in each of these areas were found, including: initial focus on the mechanics of change and gradual expansion to the community (for awareness); decreased compartmentalization and increased acceptance and positiveness (for climate); systems change skills attained by team members and classroom level skills (for skills); school and classroom organization and family and community involvement (for practice); and incorporation of collaborative planning time into the school day (for policy). Among eight appendices are the proposal rating form, one school district's statement of values and vision, sample process notes, survey results, and results of a student focus group. (Contains 19 references.) (DB)

.....

\* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*

\* from the original document. \*

.....

ED 434 423

# A Qualitative Evaluation of Impact

Martha Thurlow  
Terri Vandercook  
Mary McDevitt Kraljic  
Laura Medwetz  
Marilyn Nelson  
John Sauer  
Lynn Walz

**Together We're Better**  
Inclusive School Communities in  
Minnesota Partnerships for System Change

Institute on Community  
Integration (UAP)



The College of Education  
& Human Development  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to  
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this  
document do not necessarily represent  
official OERI position or policy.

EC 307421

# **District Partnership Approach to Inclusion**

## **A Qualitative Evaluation of Impact**

Martha Thurlow  
Terri Vandercook  
Mary McDevitt Kraljic  
Laura Medwetz  
Marilyn Nelson  
John Sauer  
Lynn Walz

Together We're Better  
Inclusive School Communities in  
Minnesota/Partnerships for System Change

Institute on Community  
Integration (UAP)



The College of Education  
& Human Development

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



Published June, 1999.

This report as well as the research effort was partially supported by *Together We're Better: Inclusive School Communities in Minnesota/Partnerships for System Change* (Grant Number #H086J20010) awarded by the United States Department of Education to the Minnesota Department of Education and the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. This document does not necessarily reflect the views of the United States or Minnesota Departments of Education, the Institute on Community Integration or the University of Minnesota, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

*This publication is available in alternative formats upon request.*

For additional copies or alternative formats contact —

Publications Office  
Institute on Community Integration  
University of Minnesota  
109 Pattee Hall  
150 Pillsbury Dr. SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
(612)624-4512

<http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ici/> (Web)

## **Contents**

Introduction / p.1

Together We're Better (TWB) Systems  
Change Project / p.4

Impact Evaluation Methodology / p.8

Evaluation Findings / p.18

Conclusions / p.26

References / p.29

Appendix A / p.31

Appendix B / p.34

Appendix C / p.35

Appendix D / p.47

Appendix E / p.49

Appendix F / p.53

Appendix G / p.54

Appendix H / p.58

# Introduction

Today's schools are pursuing more inclusive approaches for serving students with disabilities than did schools of the past. For the most part, the trend toward greater inclusion has developed slowly out of the realization that neither general education nor special education has, on its own, been successful in serving children and youth with developmental and other disabilities. This shift in education has been reflected in a variety of terms and initiatives, including *mainstreaming*, *the regular education initiative (REI)*, and *inclusion*. The movement has been supported by several court cases, which have held that a student must receive the opportunity for placement in a regular class (with appropriate support services and supplementary aids) before being denied the opportunity for placement in an inclusive setting (Lipton, 1994).

## Inclusion Research

While previously there had been little research to direct mainstreaming, REI, or inclusion efforts, there now is research that addresses these topics. Unfortunately, this research has involved both "good" implementation and "not very good" implementation of the philosophy of each approach to service delivery. If there is any definite conclusion that can be reached from the research, it is that the target population needs to be defined and there needs to be fidelity of implementation of the inclusion model before the results are accepted.

When there is implementation fidelity and the target population is students with severe disabilities, the research evidence is quite clear about the effects of inclusion, even though relatively limited in its scope. For example, the findings that exist indicate that inclusion is related to —

- **Improved quality in IEPs and increased number of academic, behavioral, and social skills goals or objectives** (Hunt et al., 1994; Kaskinen-Chapman, 1992; Ryndak, Downing, Jacqueline, & Morrison, 1995).
- **Lack of negative academic or behavioral effects on classmates of students with severe disabilities** (e.g., Hollowood, Salisbury, Rainforth, & Palombaro, 1994; Kaskinen-Chapman, 1992; Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994), **and, in fact, greater sensitivity and acceptance of differences** (Giangreco, Edelman, Cloninger, & Dennis, 1993; Kaskinen-Chapman, 1992; Peck, Donaldson, & Pezzoli, 1990).
- **Improved levels of engagement and social interactions of students with disabilities with their peers and with adults** (Hunt et al., 1994; Strully & Strully, 1985).
- **Improved attitudes of teachers about "inclusion" after having experience teaching in inclusive classrooms** (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Kaskinen-Chapman, 1992; Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996).

A recent summary of the literature on inclusion (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998) provides one of the most comprehensive analyses of the impact of inclusive schooling practices. The major outcomes that the authors identify for students with disabilities (skills and social outcomes)

are listed in Table 1, along with the identified effects of inclusion on students without disabilities.

It is interesting to note that some of the more negative research findings on inclusion have come from research on teachers' attitudes. For example, in a synthesis of findings from 28 investigations, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found several common themes that were independent of the geographical region in which the research was conducted or the time the research was published. Among these themes was the consistent perception among teachers that they did not have sufficient time, skills, training, or

resources to pursue successful inclusion. It is important to realize that the studies involved teachers both with and without experience in inclusion. Regardless of their opinion that they were lacking in time, skills, training, and resources, however, half of the teachers thought that inclusion could provide some benefits, both to students with disabilities and to their peers without disabilities.

In an extensive study involving 680 elementary and secondary regular and special education teachers and administrators, Villa et al. (1996) assessed perceptions of inclusion of students with disabilities. Two major factors were exam-

**Table 1. Inclusion Outcomes for Students With and Without Disabilities Identified in the Research Synthesis of McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998)**

---

**Skill Acquisition for Students with Disabilities**

- Students with disabilities demonstrate high levels of social interaction in settings with their typical peers, but placement alone does not guarantee positive social outcomes.
- Social competence and communication skills improve when students with disabilities are educated in inclusive settings.
- Students with disabilities have demonstrated gains in other areas of development when they are educated in inclusive settings.
- Interactive, small group contexts facilitate skill acquisition and social acceptance for students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

**Social Outcomes for Students with Disabilities**

- Friendships do develop between students with disabilities and their typical peers in inclusive settings.
- Teachers play a critical role in facilitating friendships between students with disabilities and their typical peers.
- Friendship and membership is facilitated by longitudinal involvement in the classroom and routine activities of the school.

**Impact on Students without Disabilities**

- The performance of typically-developing students is not compromised by the presence of students with disabilities in their classrooms.
  - Typically developing students derive benefits from their involvement and relationships with students with disabilities.
  - The presence of students with disabilities in the general education classroom provides a catalyst for learning opportunities and experiences that might not otherwise be part of the curriculum.
- 

Source: Table is a listing of text headings in McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998), pp 57-60.

ined with a survey instrument: (a) the benefits of heterogeneous (i.e., inclusive) education for all students, and (b) the necessary changes in school organization and culture to support heterogeneous education. For regular education teachers and administrators, agreement with the items representing these two factors increased significantly when the following items were present: (a) inservice training and technical assistance, (b) administrative support, (c) collaboration of general and special educators, (d) provision of time for collaboration, and (e) restructuring efforts within the school. Furthermore, general educators with experience in teaching students with disabilities were in significantly greater agreement with the items comprising the two major factors than their counterparts without such experience. Significant increases in special education teachers' and administrators' agreement with the factors was a function of only one variable: the extent of collaboration occurring among special and general educators. The majority of respondents in this study believed that —

- General and special educators share a responsibility for meeting the needs of all children.
- General and special educators are able to work together as coequal partners.
- The achievement level of students with disabilities does not decrease in regular education classrooms.
- Team teaching arrangements of general and special educators results in enhanced feelings of competency for both general and special educators. (Villa et al., 1996, p. 40)

The research that has been conducted highlights the need to be sure that inclusion is well implemented. This conclusion is supported by the research analysis of McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998), which identified three conclusions about the impact of inclusion on teachers —

- Although many teachers are initially reluctant about inclusion, they become confident in their abilities with support and experience. (p. 68)
- Support from other teachers is a powerful and necessary resource to empower teachers to problem-solve new instructional challenges. (p. 68)
- Facilitating the inclusion of students with disabilities requires the sensitivity to make on-the-spot judgments about the type and amount of support to encourage participation while not interfering with student interactions. (p. 69)

Findings on teachers' opinions also suggest that implementation must occur systemwide for changes to be optimally implemented and to endure.

# Together We're Better (TWB) Systems Change Project

In 1987, the U.S. Department of Education began funding a statewide systems change priority to assist states in finding ways to move their schools toward the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in general education settings. Minnesota received one of these grants in 1992. Minnesota was considered an ideal location for the systems change effort because there was significant evidence of progressive inclusion within the state. For example, individual families had successfully advocated for placement of their children with severe disabilities in regular classrooms, advocacy agencies were actively working to inform and encourage other individuals and agencies to pursue a vision of all children learning together, due process hearings and local demonstrations focused attention on the support for inclusion, and leaders in higher education and education agencies voiced their support for inclusion.

Despite this foundation, and significant increases between 1987 and 1991 in the numbers of students with severe disabilities who spent more than half of their time in general education settings (from 10% to 30%), progress was still considered by some individuals to be slow. Many communities in Minnesota had not responded to the need to develop more inclusive educational systems, and demonstrations were fragile in many of the school systems that had responded to the need. There was little stability in efforts, and no assurance that efforts could be maintained. Broad contextual factors like these indi-

cated that it was a critical time for Minnesota to institute a more comprehensive and coordinated effort to create and sustain statewide systems change for inclusion, one that was clearly conceptualized and firmly rooted in the larger system of general education.

The systems-change project was called Together We're Better, or simply TWB, because it was devoted to bringing about an inclusive, positive, supportive educational system in Minnesota. Its vision was to develop a single educational system that supports the membership, participation, and learning of all students. The project worked toward five general goal areas —

## 1. General education/special education collaboration within the state department of education

This goal was originally identified because the state of Minnesota was strongly pursuing outcome-based education and working toward the development of a state department of education in which special education was integrally involved in general education programs and initiatives, rather than operating as a separate entity. During the time of the grant award, the state department of education experienced a number of significant changes that have reduced the emphasis on collaboration between general and special education. The grant was designed to support an existing priority of collaboration and not to establish or re-establish that priority. Because of this change of focus, this goal area also decreased as an emphasis of grant efforts.

## **2. District partnerships**

Selected districts were identified through a granting process to work in partnership with project staff on inclusive education and school reform. The primary structure for technical assistance to the district was the establishment of a core planning team (CPT) for creating a more inclusive school community. Project staff worked in two-person teams to provide technical assistance to each district partner.

## **3. Personnel preparation/development**

Personnel preparation and development activities had two primary emphases: (a) integration of an inclusive schooling content in personnel development and graduate training programs, and (b) research and dissemination focused on the role of educators in creating and supporting inclusive schooling practices.

## **4. Staff development training**

Training was intended to be provided throughout the state via several mechanisms, including (a) our work with district partners, (b) statewide and national conferences, (c) sponsorship of annual statewide conferences and a final year national conference, and (d) development of an inclusion mentorship program. Training did occur via all of these venues. However, in year two of the grant, the decision was made to drop the statewide annual conferences and the national conference. Project personnel believed that the project's impact for staff development and training would be greater by co-sponsoring and participating in already existing conferences, especially those that included both general educators and special educators, rather than devel-

oping a new conference. The Inclusion Mentorship Program involved teams of general educators, special educators, parents, and administrators from 14 districts throughout the state of Minnesota. These teams acted as regional resources to schools and families interested in the development of inclusive school communities. The teams participated in a three-day training institute each summer that focused on how to facilitate systems change for the support of inclusive school communities.

## **5. Family leadership**

This goal was attended to in several ways, including the membership of parents on district partner core planning teams and inclusion mentorship teams. In addition, an extensive family needs assessment was developed, administered, evaluated, and disseminated in collaboration with the major advocacy groups in Minnesota.

Over time, as the project evolved, the second general goal area (district partnerships) became a primary focus of project efforts. This occurred in part because the district partnerships proved to be the point of most influence.

District partnerships were devoted to systems change efforts focused on selected school districts. The two specific objectives within this goal were to —

- Involve school districts to serve as primary systems change partners.
- Study what works and what does not work for creating inclusive educational systems in collaboration with local education agencies.

## **TWB District Partnership Approach to Systems Change**

District partnerships were established with four districts. The first two districts (A and B) were part of the initial application for federal funding for the TWB project. These district partnerships started in Year 1. For the other two districts (C and D), applications had to be submitted to become district partners. The application process required that representatives of general education, special education, district-level administration, and parents jointly prepare the application, which had to address the following five questions —

- 1. What are the capacities or assets within your district that support the provision of a quality education to all students in an inclusive school community?** Please describe any current district-wide strategic planning and action initiatives.
  - Does the district have a stated mission?
  - Have district-wide visions and values been articulated?
  - If yes, how were the mission, vision, and values developed?
  - Does the current district mission, vision, and values reflect and include a commitment to supporting students with disabilities in their neighborhood schools and general education classrooms with the supports and services needed to enhance their membership, active participation, and learning?

- 2. Please describe the current placement and support provided for students of all ages with disabilities in your district.** What types of placement are utilized in your district (e.g., self-contained classrooms, resource rooms, general education classrooms with support, etc.) and for whom?
- 3. What changes would you like to accomplish in your district as a result of your participation in the District Partnership Program?** Please respond to this question by reviewing your current status as described in questions 1 (attention to inclusion in district-wide initiatives) and 2 (placement and support). Please describe at least three targets that you feel would best support your efforts to build a more inclusive school community.
- 4. What are the most significant barriers to change and/or challenges that face your district in order to expand upon your efforts to build a more inclusive school community?**
- 5. What will your district be able to contribute (financial, leadership, consultative, etc.) toward overcoming the barriers and advancing the changes you have identified?**

Submitted proposals were reviewed using a set of criteria, with each criterion rated on a three-point scale. The review criteria are included in Appendix A. In general, the new districts viewed inclusion as an issue solidly connected to their overall vision and plans. Part of the selection process involved looking at the district's mission and whether it included all students.

The basic district partnership process involved setting up a core team to work with staff from the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (referred to here as the TWB staff). The core team and the TWB staff met on a monthly basis to discuss the vision for the district and to establish strategies for reaching that vision. This, of

course, was a very individualized process, for what would be important or effective in one district might not be a priority or be successful in another. In the same way, what might be relevant in one district might not be relevant in another district. The specific commitments of districts and the support they received from TWB staff are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Commitments and Supports for District Partners**

| Commitments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Supports                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Core District Team</b><br/>Identify team of key stakeholders to provide leadership, including parents, general and special education teachers, principals, students, central office administration, director of special education, and school board members.</p> | <p><b>Financial</b><br/>District grant ranging from \$2,000 to \$8,000 per year for two years to assist in implementation of goals for systemic change.</p>                                                                             |
| <p><b>Training</b><br/>Attend Summer Institute training.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p><b>On-Site Support and Consultation</b><br/>Up to 10 days available to members of the district-wide leadership team. Support is focused on the goals of the district, and to promote planned systemic educational change.</p>        |
| <p><b>Networking</b><br/>Support facilitation and membership of Partners for Inclusion Network within region in which located.</p>                                                                                                                                     | <p><b>Additional Training</b><br/>Available for 3 years through summer institutes.</p>                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p><b>Dissemination</b><br/>Share experiences and knowledge with other districts, state agencies (e.g., department meetings), and state organizations (e.g., Special Education Advisory Committee).</p>                                                                | <p><b>Materials</b><br/>Access to staff development and training materials developed by the Institute on Community Integration and the Minnesota Department of Education (now, the Department of Children, Families, and Learning).</p> |
| <p><b>Evaluation</b><br/>Support program evaluation and assist in its development.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p><b>Meeting</b><br/>Participate in meeting to finalize district support needs and expectations, and develop an action plan to support goal attainment.</p>                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

# Impact Evaluation Methodology

The general evaluation plan for the Together We're Better (TWB) project included a variety of information sources. The primary sources for evaluating the impact of the project originally were to be derived from student tracking information and processing notes, which were notes recorded every month or so at meetings designed to debrief on events in each site and to solve problems or generate ideas for next steps in each district. In addition, the project decided to add direct input from district partners on their perceptions of the impact of the TWB district partnership approach, and survey data collected by some of the district partners.

The focus here is on the qualitative evaluation of the impact of the district partnerships component of the TWB project. This analysis relied on several sources of information that were not quantitative in nature. Specifically for this analysis, data triangulation included (a) project processing notes, which resulted from project meetings held monthly to discuss what had happened with district partners; (b) direct impact data from district partners; and (c) survey results when available. It was hoped that the student tracking data would provide quantitative documentation of the changes in placements of students in the partnership districts. However, the collection of these data turned out to be a challenge, as did devising a reasonable way to aggregate and analyze the data. Therefore, the tracking data were not analyzed as part of the project's evaluation.

The areas of interest for this qualitative evaluation were the areas of awareness, climate, skills, practice, and policy. Each of these was defined as including several elements, as follows —

- **Awareness**

A general and basic level of knowledge about inclusion, its definition, and the TWB project.

- **Climate**

The attitudes, concerns, and considerations related to inclusion, staff, students, and project personnel.

- **Skills**

Those skills related to successful inclusion, including collaboration, communication, and planning.

- **Practice**

The actions, both those taken to build inclusive environments, and those of everyday quality education.

- **Policy**

Rules and guidelines that govern educational practices.

The purpose of this evaluation was to examine each of the above areas from a qualitative perspective.

## Participants

The four district partners varied along several dimensions: size of district, type of community, and history in inclusive schooling. In addition, members of the core planning teams in each district varied. Finally, but no less important, districts varied in terms of the length of time involved with the TWB project. Each of the districts is described in brief here to provide a contextual background for the qualitative evaluation.

### District A

This district is a mid-size city in Minnesota that covers 206 square miles. It has a student population of nearly 6,000 students. The district has eight buildings that include four K-4 buildings, two grade 5-6 buildings, one junior high (grades 7-8), and one senior high school (grades 9-12). Staff include 127 elementary teachers, 121 secondary teachers, 116 special education teachers, and 120 special education paraprofessionals.

Approximately 16% of the 6,000 students receive special education services. Nearly 40 of these students have severe disabilities. District A has self-contained programs for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) in three of the elementary buildings. All other students with disabilities are served in special education resource rooms and general education classrooms.

Over the four year period of the project, District A gradually developed and put into practice a more inclusive school community. By the end of the project, the principles and practice of inclusion became more the norm than the exception in the school district. Inclusion is now a part of the district's culture. One practice that greatly influenced and shaped this process was greater collaboration between general and special education teachers. Special education teachers collaborate with general education teachers, paraeducators, and special service personnel (physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech, social work). Most of the general education teachers now assume greater responsibility for the education of all students.

The core planning team in District A included 15 teachers (special education and general education) and education assistants (from six elementary schools, one junior high school and one senior high school), two principals (one elemen-

tary and one junior high), four district administrators (special education director, curriculum director, staff development director, and the assistant superintendent), two parents, and two TWB program consultants. This district received funds to become a district partner in the first year, and therefore was involved in the TWB project for four years.

In 1993, the school board for the district approved the following Statement of Values and Vision for Inclusive Education —

We, the members of this learning community believe —

- Every person has great worth, with unique strengths.
- Diversity is valuable. Our differences provide an opportunity for growth and learning.
- All people can learn from each other, with each other, and about each other.
- Learning is life long.
- No limits should be placed on a person's potential to learn.
- The participation and collaboration of students, family members, school staff, and community members is necessary. We all must work together.

Our vision of the future is: Education for all students which allows them to develop to their maximum potential. Specifically —

- We envision a learning environment that serves the specific needs of all learners through the implementation of a personalized learning plan. In this environment, all people feel like they belong, and there is respect for and a celebration of diversity. Learners get along, help each other, and resolve conflicts constructively.

- We envision a learning environment where collaboration takes place among school board members and employees, students, parents, and other community members. Through ongoing staff development and support, and adequate time for planning, everyone works as a team to assist all learners to develop the skills and abilities needed for productive citizenship and life-long learning.
- We envision a learning organization where students often work in smaller, flexible groups with an array of supports, and appropriate student/teacher ratios. Curriculum will be integrated and instruction will be personalized utilizing a wide range of material resources and technology to stimulate the learning of all. Wherever possible, we will eliminate labels that exclude people or limit learning.
- We envision facilities that are functionally accessible and designed to enhance learning, preserve dignity, and support community use.
- We envision greater utilization of community resources to support learners, including community-based learning sites, service learning, and increased support for all family members.

The core planning team in District A led the process to develop this statement during the first year it worked together. The team used this statement as a foundation for its work throughout the remaining three years of participation in the TWB project. This statement was

helpful to the core planning team in setting the direction for and tone of the strategic planning process, in assisting the group to clarify whether certain activities or ideas were furthering the vision or in line with the values, and in guiding the action teams to implement their workplans. Ultimately, the values and vision statement was used as the primary resource in the design and development of the TWB Impact Survey during the last several months of the TWB project.

#### **District B**

This district is located 60 miles southwest of the major metropolitan area in the state. It is a rural and relatively stable district, with the student population remaining approximately the same for the past several years. The district has seven school buildings — five elementary schools (grades K-5), one intermediate school (grade 6), one junior high school, and one senior high school. Direct service staff include 90 elementary teachers and 80 secondary teachers. District B has approximately 4500 students, and about 500 of them are receiving special education services (11%). All students with disabilities are at their home schools in this district, and all are members of general education classrooms. They are generally included in these classrooms all day, with the appropriate supports and adaptations.

The core planning team in this district included the district superintendent, an administrative assistant, an elementary school principal and assistant principal, five teachers, the director of special services, the gifted/talented coordinator, the inclusion coordinator, the chair of the school board, a parent, and two TWB program consultants. District B received funds to become a district partner in the first year, and therefore was involved in the TWB project for four years.

The core planning team facilitated a process for developing a vision as well as identifying the barriers for reaching the established vision that involved all school community members (i.e., teachers, students, administrators, and parents). (See Appendix B for the values and vision statement.) The need for additional time for team members to meet and work together was identified as a primary barrier when developing an inclusive school community. As a result, the core planning team focussed its change efforts on the area of collaborative planning time. Inclusive education became a major area of emphasis in the district plan and by the end of the third program year, two additional collaborative planning days were added to the school calendar.

#### **District C**

This district is a second-ring suburban district in a large metropolitan area. It is one of the fastest growing districts in the state, and is one of the few districts that is constructing new buildings. District C currently has eight school buildings — one early childhood center, five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Direct service staff include 206 elementary teachers, 157 secondary teachers, 46 special and early childhood education teachers, 166 paraprofessional and clerical staff, 29 custodians, and 30 cooks. Approximately 12% of the district's 6,000 student enrollment receive special education services. Slightly more than 20 of these students have severe disabilities. The district has one elementary self-contained program for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. All other elementary students with disabilities, including those with severe and profound disabilities, and preschool youngsters with disabilities, are served in typical

classrooms. At the secondary level, students with severe and profound mental retardation are included in regular classrooms, but also have another classroom from which they move out into community settings.

District C's school board issued a statement on inclusion that drives the philosophy of the district. It states —

The [district] school board is committed to providing resources to develop a learning environment for effective inclusion of all learners. Every learning environment is to be a place where all learners are recognized as capable and are welcomed, valued, and challenged to reach their full potential. While meeting individual needs, it is imperative that learners are released from any preconceived assumptions and attitudes that may accompany labels.

This district statement is supported by the following community values, which were adopted and promoted by several of the communities that comprise the school district: citizenship, environmentalism, generosity, human worth and dignity, integrity, learning, respect for others, and responsibility. The Educational Plan of this district specifically recognizes the needs of individual learners —

In the year 2010, learners at every level in [the district] are engaged and motivated. They are encouraged to be creative and active in their learning. Because they understand how the learning is applied in real life situations, the value of what they are learning is direct and obvious. As they get older, learners become increasingly responsible for their own direction and progress. Each has a personal learning plan, a blueprint that shapes and guides an individual course toward meeting District outcomes.

The personal learning plan guides instruction in the year 2010. The plan recognizes that people learn in different ways. Learners understand their own learning style and are purposeful in using it to acquire knowledge and skills.

The activities of the core planning team in District C focused primarily on one school building — a new school designed to reflect the vision and values articulated in the district's Educational Plan. Among the themes that permeate the new model are: (a) family-like community of learners in which all are valued, (b) valuing of diversity, (c) focus on meeting individual student needs in the family cluster rather than in pull-out services, and (d) collaborative work environment that emphasizes team planning and support.

The core planning team in District C included several district-level personnel (research and development coordinator, director of unique learners, coordinator of unique learners), an elementary school principal, a high school general education teacher, an elementary school general education teacher, two elementary school special education teachers, a parent of a student with severe disabilities, a school board member, and two TWB program consultants. This district was one of the last two districts to receive funds to become a district partner, and therefore was involved in the TWB project for only two years.

#### District D

This district is a mid-size city in northwestern Minnesota. With a population of approximately 8,000, the community's economic base is from farm crops. There are four school buildings for grades K-2, 3-6, 7-12, and vocational training, and the district is in the process of completing construction on a fifth building, which will be a grade 9-12 high school. Thirty-five percent of the student body receives free or reduced lunch.

The efforts of the TWB project were focused on the new high school and the shift from the old high school to the new high school. The high school has 650 students, 47 teachers, 10 paraprofessionals, and 4.5 clerical staff. Of the students enrolled in grades 7-12, approximately 14 have a severe, profound, or moderate disability; approximately 45 students have a mild disability. Before beginning work with TWB, the students with severe disabilities received their instruction in a self-contained classroom (which, it was noted, contained materials that were not all age-appropriate; the curriculum was functional in focus). Mainstreaming consisted of eating lunch with peers and using the same halls. Much of the time working with District D during the second year was devoted to large scale systems change efforts using the concepts of Real Time Strategic Change (Jacobs, 1994; Walz & Sauer 1999).

During the course of TWB's two-year involvement with District D, inclusion began in the primary grade building, with preparations to continue this effort as students progress to each building. High school students in the self-contained room for students with moderate and severe mental retardation were successfully placed in classrooms with peers for some of the school day during the project. The high school also had a project called school-within-a-school, which focused on

using the community as an extension of the classroom. The school-within-a-school used kiosk groups and much peer support. Although initially the district had no plans to include students with disabilities in this program, it did so at the insistence of the TWB project. The school-within-a-school became a successful enrollment for students with disabilities, as well as for other at-risk students.

The core planning team in District D included the high school principal, two special education teachers, secondary departmental staff (science, social studies, English), the vocational education program coordinator, the special education director, a parent of a student with a disability, a paraprofessional, and two TWB program consultants. The school district superintendent often participated in the planning meetings on systemic change. The district received funds to become a district partner and was involved in the project for two years.

## District Partner Processing Notes

Together We're Better staff met monthly to debrief and process events related to the district partners. The purposes of the processing meetings were to —

- Review project activities in each district.
- Identify barriers to project activities.
- Evaluate strategies.
- Summarize "learnings".

Staff members working with each district reported to the group in a round-robin fashion on activities, events, barriers, and successes that had occurred in the district since the previous processing meeting. Notes were taken during these meetings by an evaluator, and these were reviewed for accuracy by each staff member. At the end of each year, the processing notes were summarized by the evaluator. These summaries addressed (a) general project activities, (b) barriers, (c) strategies, and (d) learnings. (See Appendix C for copies of the processing summaries.)

**Table 3. Impact Survey Questions on Collaboration for Inclusive Communities**

---

|                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. What have been the district-wide effects of the TWB project and its support related to —                |
| Awareness?      Climate?      Skill Development?      Practices?      Policy?                              |
| 2. For each area, identify both positive and negative effects, as well as intended and unintended effects. |
| 3. What have been the school-specific effects of the TWB project and its support related to —              |
| Awareness?      Climate?      Skill Development?      Practices?      Policy?                              |
| 4. What have been the individual effects of the TWB project and its support related to —                   |
| Awareness?      Climate?      Skill Development?      Practices?      Policy?                              |

---

### Direct Impact Questions

The questions used to guide the direct impact qualitative evaluation of the TWB district partnerships were reviewed by TWB staff members, following initial development of draft questions by two of the members. The focus of questions was kept relatively narrow in order to keep the information gathering process limited in time.

The questions were designed to assess the extent to which the overall goals of the project had been reached in each district partnership setting. The specific questions that were included are shown in Table 3.

### Indirect Impact Surveys

Although not part of the overall TWB evaluation plan, two of the district partners (A and C) decided to obtain additional input on the impact of their activities. Each of these districts developed its own survey, with assistance from TWB staff. District D students participated in a survey on inclusion near the beginning of its involvement in the TWB effort. Also,

during the last year of TWB, District D students conducted focus group interviews with the students. Although not directly relevant to the evaluation of impact, it is described here because of the evidence it provides of the students' commitment to the inclusion effort.

#### District A Surveys

In District A, both employees and parents were asked to complete a survey about the district's learning environment. Common questions for the two groups included ones focused on (a) serving the specific needs of all learners; (b) collaboration among school board members, employees, students, parents, and other community members; and (c) students working together in small flexible groups. For these and other questions in the surveys, respondents used a five point scale, from A to E, with the anchor points as follows: A = Most people are UNAWARE of these practices, C = Most people are DEVELOPING these practices, and E = These practices are internalized or AUTOMATIC. Specific information on the number and nature of questions asked of employees and parents, as well as response

rates, are presented in Table 4. The specific questions in the surveys are included in Appendix D, along with a summary of results. These results entered into this evaluation whenever they were relevant to the areas of awareness, climate, skills, practice, or policy.

Additional information was obtained in District A through focus group interviews of parents and educators. These groups reviewed findings from the Family Needs Assessment Survey conducted by TWB near the beginning of the project (Colon, Walz, & Vandercook, 1994). There were

two large focus groups, of 20 parents and 5 educators, facilitated by TWB staff; clerical staff recorded responses through word processing and core planning team members recorded responses on flip-charts. The groups had received the *Family Needs Assessment Survey Executive Summary* and discussion questions prior to the focus group session. Information from the focus group interviews was used by the core planning team to develop action plans. Also as a result of participation in the focus groups, some parents volunteered to participate on action teams.

**Table 4. Information on Indirect Impact Surveys Conducted in Three Districts**

| District A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | District C                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | District D                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Employee Survey</b><br>Nine questions related to the nature of the learning environment and the extent to which district schools are inclusive.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Employee Survey</b><br>Twenty-seven questions in the general areas of — <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic data (2 questions)</li> <li>• Perceptions of quality (16 questions)</li> <li>• Personal concerns about teamwork (9 questions)</li> <li>• Suggestions for action</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Student Focus Groups</b><br>Two topics were discussed — <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does it mean to be included and how can inclusion be promoted in this school?</li> <li>• Who should represent students at a large-scale event that will plan for the new high school?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Parent Survey</b><br>Three questions related to the nature of the learning environment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Number of Respondents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees — One hundred eighty-five at the beginning of the project and 243 after 4 years; specific numbers vary by question</li> <li>• Parents — Three at the beginning of the project and four after 4 years</li> <li>• Parent Focus Groups — Several groups of parents were interviewed during year four.</li> </ul> | <b>Student Survey</b><br>Twenty-one questions in the general areas of — <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School staff effects</li> <li>• Other student effects</li> <li>• Acceptance of other students with various characteristics</li> </ul> <b>Number of Respondents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees — Two hundred thirty-four overall; specific number varies by question</li> <li>• Students — One thousand four hundred and seven; specific number varies by question</li> </ul> | <b>Number of Respondents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students — Eight groups of 8–10 students</li> </ul> <b>Student Survey</b><br>Questions on the survey — <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thirteen questions about acceptance of others.</li> <li>• What does it mean to belong?</li> <li>• Do you think you belong at this school?</li> <li>• What are the signs of not belonging?</li> <li>• How does negative peer pressure affect you?</li> <li>• Who has power or influence over you?</li> </ul> |

### **District C Surveys**

In District C, both employees and students were surveyed to learn about their perceptions of the school and district culture and climate, particularly in relation to differences. Questions were presented to staff and students on questionnaires, and were considered by the district to provide baseline data for future revisions of its program for reaching its mission of "every learning environment is to be a place where all learners are recognized as capable and are welcomed, valued, and challenged to reach their full potential." Specific information on the number and nature of questions asked of employees and students, as well as response rates, are presented in Table 4. The specific questions in the survey are included in Appendix E, with a summary of results. These results entered into this overall evaluation whenever they were relevant to the areas of awareness, climate, skills, practice, or policy.

### **District D Surveys**

Fifteen students in District D were trained to lead focus group interviews. Two topics were discussed: What does it mean to be included and how can inclusion be promoted in this school? Who should represent students at a large-scale event that will plan for the new high school? There were eight groups of 8-10 students assigned to discuss each topic. Two or three student moderators led the discussions. The information was written into two reports by the 15 students and reported to various groups interested in school reform (e.g., TWB core planning team, school board, teaching staff, student council). All students in grades 9-12 were surveyed in District D. The survey was on feeling included and being accepted. The results are in Appendices F, G, and H.

### **Procedures**

The basic procedure used to collect impact evaluation information was to convene a meeting of the core planning team for the purpose of responding to the questions (see Table 3). This was done in a focus group format, where the participating members saw the questions and then responded verbally within the group setting. This procedure allowed for interactions among members and increased the richness of the information. It also, of course, opened the possibility of responses influencing other responses, or changing in some way the responses that individual team members provided. This latter possibility was believed to be quite small, however, since the teams had worked together to the point that a level of trust existed that allowed them to express opposing opinions openly with little restraint.

The basic procedure was adapted to accommodate individual team needs and desires. For example, in one district the team wanted to obtain broader input than could be provided by only the team members. That team used the impact questions to develop a survey that was then sent to each school in the district, and completed at building staff meetings. The variation in procedures in the four districts is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Specific Data Gathering Procedures in Four Districts**

---

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>District A</b> | Information was collected in two ways — through core planning team members and through a district-wide survey. When the plan to collect information on impact was first discussed at the core planning team meeting in February, it was decided that team members would think about the impacts themselves, and that they would gather information from colleagues. This latter focus was expanded to the development of a district survey form, which one of the action groups of the core planning team developed. The survey asked the respondent to rate five components (from the district inclusive education vision statement) on a 5-point Likert scale for two points in time (1991/1992 and 1995/1996). It also contained six open-ended questions about impact. More than 20 people participated in the April meeting where the results of the survey were shared and the general discussion of TWB impact occurred. In attendance were about 15 teachers and education assistants from six elementary schools, one junior high school, and one senior high school; four district administrators (assistant superintendent, curriculum director, staff development director, special education director); two parents; and two TWB staff members. Two team members recorded the brainstorming input, with round-robin listing of all ideas on flipcharts. This was followed by a summary discussion of the collective thoughts and opinions. |
| <b>District B</b> | Information was collected through a large group discussion with the core planning team in June. The team gathered for an evening dinner meeting. Before the meeting, a sheet describing the topics for discussion was distributed to each team member. The members were advised to use the sheet to jot down their thoughts so that they could contribute effectively to the large group discussion. Seven district people participated in the meeting: the district inclusion coordinator, the district special education director, a parent, a special education teacher, a physical education teacher, an elementary school principal, and an elementary teacher. Two people (one a project person and the other a district person) recorded the input provided at the meeting. The information from the meeting was recorded on chart paper, then later transferred to a summary sheet.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>District C</b> | Information was collected in two ways — through core planning team members and through a district-wide survey of staff and a survey of students in two schools. The core planning team discussed the impact of TWB during its March 1996 meeting. In all buildings, staff were given time during staff meetings to complete the surveys. An incentive to complete the surveys was provided in each school, with the specific incentive determined by the school site team. For students in the district's middle school and high school, time was provided in class to complete the survey.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>District D</b> | Information was collected through a large group discussion with the core planning team at the April and May 1996 meetings. The coordinating team received the request for the impact data. Discussion about impact of TWB was placed on the agenda. At the April meeting, the 12 team members were given the questions. The team brainstormed a list of the people or groups who were impacted by the activities of TWB. At the next meeting, team members received the listing of the people and groups identified and the categories of awareness, climate, skill, practice, and policy. The team recalled activities resulting from the project. Using round robin listing and flipcharts, all team members contributed to creating a list of impacts to specific people or groups by activity. TWB staff later transferred the information to a summary sheet.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

---

# Evaluation Findings

The findings from the district partnership impact evaluation, the processing notes, and survey data are presented here within the areas of (a) awareness, (b) climate, (c) skills, (d) practice, and (e) policy. The willingness of districts to participate in the impact evaluation at the end of very busy years should be considered as an indicator of impact. Furthermore, the initiatives taken by two districts in conducting broader surveys also is an indicator of the positive impact of TWB and the district partnership arrangement.

## Awareness

Seven primary themes were identified in the information provided by district partners related to impacts on awareness —

- Initial focus on the **mechanics of change**.
- Annoyance with **challenging logistics**.
- Clarification of **commitment to inclusion**.
- Challenge of **previous perceptions**.
- Gradual **expansion to the community**.
- Emerging **individual revelations**.
- Slow but steady **trust building**.

Some of these themes (or components of them) reflected unintended consequences. Differences between districts with more time as district partners and those with less time also were evident.

## Mechanics of Change

How to bring about change was the focus of districts new to the Together We're Better (TWB) partnerships when impact was evaluated (Districts C and D). Lists of impacts from these districts in large part focused on what had happened rather than on new awareness that resulted. For example, districts referred to the training they received on the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) or to the large-scale interventions, as well as to who had been the target of awareness-level activities, rather than to the results of these activities. Districts with more experience tended to more often list impacts that addressed their commitment to inclusion, or their realization of past perceptions that were impeding the acceptance of inclusion. This focus on the mechanics of change may be due, in part, to the additional time needed to realize the awareness that had been achieved.

Related to the initial focus on the mechanics of change was attention to making the core planning team work. In each district, the core planning team had been formed to drive educational change in the district. Designated TWB staff members worked on an ongoing basis with each district through the core planning team to support systems change efforts focused on creating an educational system that supports the membership, participation, and learning of all students. Work with the core planning team was designed to ensure that project efforts focused on and involved those who impact and are impacted by systems change. Direct training was infused into working with the core planning team in the areas of effective team functioning, strategic planning (e.g., real time strategic change), and inclusive education. The core planning team, in general, included general educators, special educators, support personnel, related

service personnel, school administrators, school board members, parents, and community agency personnel.

Because the core planning team was a key element of change, it necessarily was the focus of concern — it had to work well in order for it to carry its efforts to a broader level. Frequently, making the team work involved knowing not just what the meetings of the team needed to be like (e.g., to include time for personal exchanges and celebrations, to respect individual needs, to balance hard work with humor), but also making a concerted effort to build trust.

Over time, there was increasing awareness that change could not occur as fast as many wanted it to occur. This realization (which was most evident from processing notes) led to frustration for some, but ultimately contributed to change that was more enduring than it might have been otherwise.

### **Challenging Logistics**

Concerns about challenging logistics proved to be an annoyance, particularly during the initial stages of awareness. The use of substitute teachers and the perceived disruption that it caused for students was one challenge. Another was the perception that the partnership had created extra work for the school secretary (e.g., scheduling substitute teachers). The agitation surrounding these logistical issues seemed to dissipate as the district partners experienced success in their efforts. They also were directly addressed. For example, one district changed the meeting time for the core planning team to evenings.

In one site (one of the newer districts), several individuals were quite vocal in their expression of annoyance with challenging logistics, but these individuals did not seem to speak for the entire group. The focus of their concerns ranged from

the mechanics of effective team meetings (e.g., the use of ice-breakers and levity in team meetings) to the school-building climate (e.g., perceived inappropriateness of elementary school procedures being applied in secondary settings). Annoyance seemed to reflect the challenge of leveraging a new approach while keeping the old system going.

### **Commitment to Inclusion**

Perhaps the biggest impact at the awareness level was the clarification that occurred in each district regarding the commitment to inclusion. This impact was mentioned by all districts, and thus appears to be one that is recognized relatively early in the partnership process. The way in which this impact was realized varied across districts. For example, in one district, the strong commitment was seen in the leadership of an individual. In three of the districts, the district partnership activities clarified for team members, school staff, and the larger community that there was a very strong and pervasive commitment to an inclusive philosophy. It had become evident, as one district stated, that "inclusion is here to stay — it is not part of a pendulum swing, as others may have thought or as happens so commonly with new initiatives." It is believed that the district expressing this conclusion reached it because inclusion and systems change had been attended to pervasively throughout the district in many different ways, and because the core planning team included a large contingency of general educators, and a true general education — special education partnership of administrators and teachers.

The fact that all districts were aware of the commitment to inclusion does not mean that it came easily to all districts. In fact, district processing notes indicated that districts sometimes struggled with

how best to get the message of commitment embraced by all. Suggestions that came out of these struggles (e.g., bring in students to talk about the benefits of inclusion) provide good lessons for other districts moving into inclusive education.

### **Previous Perceptions**

A growing awareness also occurred about previous perceptions and how they were a challenge to inclusion. Perceptions about parents and families were mentioned by one district, with the notation that the awareness involved not only how previous perceptions restricted the collaboration that needed to occur for successful inclusion, but also the awareness that families were necessary partners in the partnership. Another school district reached the same awareness about students and the need for their involvement in inclusion.

Previous perceptions about inclusion also were mentioned, with the awareness being that no matter how much they thought they knew, they really did not know much, and that "the more we know, the more we need to know." There was also the growing awareness that inclusion is just one part of a quality education for any child, an education that reflects systemic connections. Related to previous perceptions was the observation that before changes can begin to occur, districts must realize that everything is not fine. This was evident through processing notes that revealed the apparent inability to make progress until the district partners realized that they were inaccurate in their perception that district staff were committed to inclusive education and cognizant of the benefits of this approach for students.

### **Expansion to the Community**

An awareness of the need for a gradual expansion of inclusion to the broader community was evident in the input from those districts that had been TWB partners the longest. These districts indicated that a major impact of the district partnerships had been the increased awareness of the community about inclusion and about what was happening in the schools. This impact may have been less in the newer districts because these districts were selected, in part, because they were further along in their thinking. They possibly already had engendered considerable community awareness about inclusion, and thus this was less evident to them in their perceptions of impact.

As districts moved to expand inclusion into the broader community, it became evident again (as when core planning teams first met) that key concepts are understood differently by different people. District partnership processing notes demonstrated that this occurred more than once, even when concerted efforts were made to provide people with definitions from the beginning. All districts came to an awareness that it is important to keep talking about the meaning of key concepts so that over time, people get closer to having shared meanings of these concepts.

### **Individual Revelations**

Least frequently mentioned, but still very obvious in the awareness impact themes, were those related to individual, personal revelations. For the most part, these seemed to be emerging, and therefore more common in those districts that had been involved in partnerships for longer periods of time. But, they also occurred in new districts. Examples of personal level awareness included a reduction in fear about individuals with severe disabilities, and an increased sensitivity to student

needs in general. These revelations occurred not just for those individuals who were members of core planning teams. Rather, core planning team members observed these kinds of revelations occurring for people in the buildings in which inclusion efforts were underway.

### **Trust Building**

Although not mentioned frequently in the impact evaluation, the development of trust was another awareness level theme that emerged more clearly through the processing notes. In each district, it was necessary for trust to be built. This occurred at a slow but steady rate, which meant that those districts newest to the project still had a ways to go and districts that had been part of the TWB project for four years were much farther along in establishing trust.

Trust had to be built in several different ways. In some districts, trust had to be built not just with project personnel, but with the core planning team and with district administrators as well. In other districts, an internal sense of trust was fairly well established, but had to be built upon for the TWB project to proceed. In all of the varied ways that trust had to be built, and to the varying degrees that it had to be built, it was never a rapid process. It was clear that it was important to start slow in building trust; any activities that might be viewed as threatening needed to be delayed until later. Slow but steady always characterized trust building, even though the "slow" was faster in some districts than in others.

## **Climate**

Three impact themes in the area of climate and changes in climate were identified —

- Decreased **compartmentalization**.
- Increased **acceptance and positiveness**.
- Sense of **renewed energy** combined with a more relaxed attitude.

The impacts in this area are more differentiated between the districts with less time involved in the partnership compared to those with more partnership time.

### **Compartmentalization**

The decreased amount of compartmentalization in the school, particularly in relation to special education, was most often noted by those districts in new partnerships. Impacts ranged from basic level reflections of this (special education is not separate from the rest) to more pervasive reflections (decisions are made with the involvement of all staff, including para-professional staff).

Certain things were identified through processing notes as being barriers to moving toward this decreased compartmentalization. Other major initiatives in a district posed a definite barrier that had to be overcome. Among the most prominent in the districts during the TWB efforts were a lawsuit and pervasive staff changes.

It also became evident, however, that some of the greatest changes and learnings occurred at times of relaxation, such as during lunch. This realization reinforces the notion that it is important to include times of relaxation if change is to occur smoothly.

### Acceptance and Positiveness

In the longer-term district partnerships, a climate of acceptance and positiveness was reflected in the input on impact. It was noted that staff were more relaxed with students with severe disabilities and that there was a more pervasive view that all students could learn. Even in those districts that were newer, acceptance and positiveness were evident in the input. For example, philosophical changes were being attributed to some components of the educational system (e.g., special education was becoming more outcome oriented). Some of this acceptance and positiveness already existed in the newer districts, of course, but seemed to have been expanded through working with the TWB project.

### Renewed Energy

A climate of renewed energy was noted by the longer-term partnerships. This was reflected in the commitment to all students, and the assumption of responsibility for all students' learning. Logistical issues were no longer a major priority because these were viewed as something that had to be mastered to achieve the goals of inclusion. The input reflected a more relaxed attitude and acceptance of needed changes.

Possible reasons for renewed energy were probably two-fold. First, repeated successes from working within areas they could influence was a major source of renewed energy for core planning team members. The road to renewed energy began with developing a shared vision, identifying practices to support the move toward the vision, and working together to continue making steps in a continuous journey toward the vision. Second, renewed energy was generated as team members learned something new, such as team teaching techniques, that also helped them move toward the group vi-

sion. These were facilitated and expanded more quickly when the core planning team had broad representation in addressing issues and working through barriers.

### Skills

Four primary themes were identified in the information provided by district partners related to impacts on skills —

- **Systems change skills** attained by team members.
- **Effective personal and interpersonal skills** attained by team members and others.
- **Beginning classroom level skills.**
- **Student skills.**

These skills were identified by all districts, regardless of the amount of time involved as district partners. In addition, one or two very individualized skills were mentioned, such as the development of grant writing skills among a few staff who wrote a grant to obtain funds for a large-scale intervention.

### Systems Change Skills

All districts mentioned several skills related to the implementation of systems change activities. Among the skills mentioned specifically were —

- Developing a vision statement.
- Engaging in action planning.
- Roles clarification.
- Strategic planning.

In general, these skills were ones that were limited to the members of the core planning team. The extent to which the skills were transferred to others is unknown, except in one case (see discussion of Student Skills).

It did become evident to several of the districts that communication and networking were critical system change skills. Specifically, the importance of having a liaison from the core planning team to each building was identified in the district partnership processing notes.

#### **Personal and Interpersonal Skills**

Nearly all of the district partners mentioned a host of personal and interpersonal skills that had been gained as a result of the district partnerships. Among the skills mentioned were —

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Meeting management

In many cases, these skills seemed to extend beyond just the members of the core planning team. To a large extent, this occurred because members of the core planning team began to use the skills they had acquired with others, and then others used them with others.

Leadership was a particularly critical skill that was developed in district partners and that was critical to successful change efforts. TWB staff realized that it was important to identify and work with a district leader before meeting with other staff. This person could act as a link between project staff and school personnel. The commitment of district leadership was particularly critical during startup and at times of confusion.

#### **Classroom Level Skills**

Only a couple of the district partners mentioned any skills related to the classroom level. And, these were characterized as emerging skills. One of the specifically mentioned skills was team teaching. Another was modifying class lessons to increase the learning of all students. Although skills related to building-level functioning might be expected more than classroom-level skills, these were specifically mentioned only by individuals at the one school that received specific training on collaborative teaming (District C). Many building-level skills, however, are reflected in systems-change level skills that were identified.

#### **Student Skills**

Two of the district partners mentioned specific skills that had been gained by students. Both of these districts identified the skills that had been attained by the students with severe disabilities. Among the identified skills were social skills (in all students) and contributing to the class (students with severe disabilities). In addition, one of the districts specifically mentioned the skills gained by general education high school students who were engaged to run focus groups of their peers on the topic of inclusion in their school. These students gained valuable skills in the areas of group leadership, interviewing, and report writing. Students also were involved in design and logistics teams, served as panel members and as participants on small groups for a large scale intervention process.

## Practice

The impact of the district partnerships on practice was varied. When districts identified impact, they tended to mention specific changes in practice. These changes concentrated on the areas of —

- School and classroom organization.
- Classroom activities.
- Family and community involvement.

Many of these impacts were alluded to in preceding sections.

### School and Classroom Organization

Changes in school and classroom organizations were evidenced in a variety of ways. Among them were relatively major organizational changes, such as switching to multi-age classroom and cross-age learning arrangements. The incorporation of time for students to be with a consistent group of students of various ages (and including their own siblings) was another major organizational change that was noted.

Other major organizational changes related to how the school day (and the time of staff) was organized. It was noted previously that time for collaborative planning was built into the week in one district (District B). In another district, the role of paraprofessionals in the building was revised, so that these individuals were viewed more as key collaborators in the education of all children (and as people deserving their own mailboxes). In one instance, additional paraprofessional staff were hired to better meet student needs. It was also noted that staff members had become more involved at all levels of decision making, both in the building and in the district.

There also was recognition of wider organizational changes. For example, in one district, the greater amount of collaboration among school buildings within the district, initially around the issue of inclusion, but later expanded, was noted. The "trickle down" effect of changes was noted in a district in which only the high school was participating in the district partnership efforts. In another district, new connections with other districts also were identified.

District partnership processing notes revealed several related findings. For example, it became clear that a major step that had to occur before changes in practice were likely to endure was for school personnel to begin to take ownership. This often was a difficult step, for it was almost always easier to assume that someone else would do the things that needed to be done.

Several steps toward taking ownership were noted. Among them was to have school personnel gradually take responsibility for setting meeting agendas. Another was to continue involvement in activities over summer months so that fall startup was not so difficult. Similarly, the need for continued debriefing was noted; this helped to reduce the tendency for different perceptions of events to be carried forward. Finally, it was also observed in processing notes that having partners publicly describe how to make inclusion work was a way to build understanding and ownership.

### **Classroom Activities**

Many of the classroom level changes in practice that were identified have been mentioned before, or are reflected in the organizational changes discussed above. However, several kinds of general comments were made related to classroom activities. One perceptive comment was that there had been numerous "substantive but subtle changes" in classroom activities. Among the specifically mentioned classroom activities was that teachers were considering students with disabilities when planning their instruction, even to the point of making decisions about materials to order based on their appropriateness for the students with disabilities as well as for other students. The role of paraprofessionals as contributors to the entire classroom process, rather than just as helpers to individual students, also was an impact that was mentioned. District processing notes revealed that being able to provide examples of successful implementation of inclusive education was one of the most helpful ways of influencing classroom activities.

### **Family and Community Involvement**

Several district partners also mentioned changes in the involvement in education of district parents and families, and other community members as well. District partners went beyond mentioning parent involvement to discuss "true" parent involvement. They saw this reflected in many different ways, including greater involvement in school decision making, participation in a parent mentorship program, and more relaxed IEP meetings. Another practice skill mentioned by one of the district partners — conducting survey information and using software to analyze it — related specifically to finding ways to make it easier to obtain broader input from parents regarding education in the district.

Greater parent and family involvement often was balanced by the recognition that there also was greater community involvement. This was viewed very positively, particularly in regard to the commitment to inclusion that was seen at the community level.

### **Policy**

The impact of the TWB district partnerships on policy seemed to be much less than the impact in other areas, as would be expected given the purpose of these partnerships. The one policy change noted, that being the incorporation of collaborative planning time into the school day in some schools, is not necessarily surprising because much effort was put into bringing about this change in two of the districts. Action teams were formed to bring about this change, and as a result, it happened.

Most district partners suggested that although school policies had not been changed, other changes that had occurred were more important. In fact, one district suggested that the inclusion philosophy would have a significant effect on policy because it would become the foundation for policies that would be developed in the future.

# Conclusions

We examined the impact of a district partnership approach to systems change in which greater inclusion of students with severe disabilities was the systemic change goal. The qualitative approach that we used provided us with valuable information on the impact of the district partnership approach. Specifically, we gleaned several major themes related to five areas of focus. They are highlighted in Table 6.

While these major themes permeated all districts, they were evident in greater or lesser degrees depending on the experience of the district with the partnership approach, which in turn, seemed to interact with the extent to which the district had progressed on its own toward an inclusion model (before becoming involved with Together We're Better).

Many of the themes that emerged from our qualitative impact analysis align with recent conclusions about successful edu-

**Table 6. Major Themes from Qualitative Analysis**

| Awareness                                 | Climate                                                        | Skill Development                                                                | Practice                           | Policy                  |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Initial focus on the mechanics of change. | Slow but steady trust building.                                | Systems change skills attained by team members.                                  | School and classroom organization. | (Non-specific effects). |
| Annoyance with challenging logistics.     | Decreased compartmentalization.                                | Effective personal and interpersonal skills attained by team members and others. | Classroom activities.              |                         |
| Clarification of commitment to inclusion. | Increased acceptance and positiveness.                         |                                                                                  | Family and community involvement.  |                         |
| Challenge of previous perceptions.        | Sense of renewed energy combined with a more relaxed attitude. | Beginning classroom level skills.                                                |                                    |                         |
|                                           |                                                                | Student skills.                                                                  |                                    |                         |
| Gradual expansion to the community.       |                                                                |                                                                                  |                                    |                         |
| Emerging individual revelations.          |                                                                |                                                                                  |                                    |                         |

cation reform drawn from 12 projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. These projects covered a wide array of topics, including students at risk, early childhood reform; educator professionalism, curriculum reform, technology, and school to work. Eight lessons about reform were derived from these projects (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1996). These are summarized in Table 7.

Each of these lessons was reflected to some degree in the district partnership findings. This strengthens the results of the qualitative analysis conducted on the impact of TWB initiatives with district partners. However, the primary utility of this report lies in the description and validation of a specific approach, the district partnership approach to supporting an inclusive ethic for educating students with disabilities.

**Table 7. Lessons from OERI Studies of Education Reform**

| <b>Lesson</b>                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Components of Lesson</b>                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Leadership</b><br>Strong leadership enhances the prospect of successful reform.                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laying a groundwork for reform</li> <li>• Securing buy-in</li> <li>• Delegating responsibility</li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>Goals</b><br>Reform goals should be based on a shared vision and have the active support of a wide range of stakeholders who participate in achieving them.                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Envisioning reform goals</li> <li>• Building support for reform</li> <li>• Assigning reform responsibilities</li> </ul>                        |
| <b>Timing</b><br>School reform takes time and involves risk.                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using time intelligently</li> <li>• Taking risks</li> </ul>                                                                                    |
| <b>Training</b><br>Participants must have training before they implement reform.                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing roles and relationships</li> <li>• Adapting training strategies</li> </ul>                                                            |
| <b>Flexibility</b><br>Reform strategies should be flexible to accommodate multiple solutions to a given problem.                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting a strategy</li> <li>• Accommodating multiple solutions</li> <li>• Phasing in reform</li> <li>• Adapting to the unexpected</li> </ul> |
| <b>Infrastructure</b><br>Reforms may require redesigning organizational infrastructure.                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recasting institutional relationships</li> <li>• Relating to the community</li> </ul>                                                          |
| <b>Managing Resources</b><br>Reform prospects improve if there is a means to redirect or reallocate resources in ways that meet the needs of the new, emerging system. Reform is not cost-free. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding reform</li> <li>• Reallocating resources</li> </ul>                                                                                    |
| <b>Self-Assessment</b><br>Reform is an ongoing process.                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining reform in an evolving climate</li> <li>• Using evaluations for program improvement</li> </ul>                                      |

# References

- Colon, E. J., Walz, L., & Vandercook, T. (1994). *Inclusive education needs of Minnesota families*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration.
- Covey, S.R. (1989). *The seven habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change*. New York: Fireside, Simon & Schuster.
- Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Giangreco, M.F., Dennis, R., Cloninger, C., Edelman, S., & Schattman, R. (1993). "I've counted Jon": Transformational experiences of teachers educating students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 59(4), 359-372.
- Giangreco, M., Edelman, S., Cloninger, C., & Dennis, R. (1993). My child has a classmate with severe disabilities: What parents of nondisabled children think about full inclusion. *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin*, 21(1), 77-91.
- Hollowood, T.M., Salisbury, C.L., Rainforth, B., & Palombaro, M.M. (1994). Use of instructional time in classrooms serving students with and without severe disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 61(3), 242-253.
- Hunt, P., Farron-Davis, F., Beckstead, S., Curtis, D., & Goetz, L. (1994). Evaluating the effects of placement of students with severe disabilities in general education versus special classes. *The Journal of the Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 19(3), 200-214.
- Jacobs, R.W. (1994). *Real time strategic change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishing, Inc.
- Kaskinen-Chapman, A. (1992). Saline Area Schools and inclusive community concepts. In R. Villa, J. Thousand, W. Stainback, & S. Stainback (Eds.), *Restructuring for caring and effective education* (pp. 169-185). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Lipton, D. (1994). The "full inclusion" court cases: 1989-1994. *Bulletin of the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion*, 1 (2), 108.
- McGregor, G., & Vogelsberg, R.T. (1998). *Inclusive schooling practices: Pedagogical and research foundations*. Pittsburgh: Allegheny University of the Health Sciences.
- Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (1996). *Fitting the pieces: Studies of education reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Peck, C. A., Donaldson, J., & Pezzoli, M. (1990). Some benefits nonhandicapped adolescents perceive for themselves from their social relationships with peers who have severe handicaps. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 15, 241-249.
- Ryndak, D.L., Downing, J.E., Jacqueline, L.R., & Morrison, A.P. (1995). Parents' perceptions after inclusion of their children with moderate or severe disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 20(2), 147 - 157.
- Scruggs, T.E., & Mastropieri, M.A. (1996). Teacher perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion, 1958-1995: A research synthesis. *Exceptional Children*, 63 (1), 59-74.

- Sharpe, M.N., York, J. L., & Knight, J. (1994). Effects of inclusion on the academic performance of classmates without disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 15(5), 281-287.
- Strully, J., & Strully, C. (1985). Friendship and our children. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 10, 224 - 227.
- Villa, R.A., Thousand, J.S., Meyers, H, & Nevin, A. (1996). Teacher and administrator perceptions of heterogeneous education. *Exceptional Children*, 63 (1), 29-45.
- Walz, L., & Sauer, J. (1999). *Planning our future together* [video and discussion guide]. (Available from the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 109 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Dr. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455, 612-624-4512)

# Appendix A

## Proposal Rating Form



### Together We're Better

Proposal Rating Form  
District Partnership Program

1. School District: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Application Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Is application complete? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

If no, what is missing? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Directions

Review each question and team response. Evaluate the team's response based on the rating definitions provided. The rating definitions are intended to give similar meaning to the ratings of different reviewers. Choose a score that best fits the response, using a rating scale from 1-3.

- 1 Point — Not more than one of the criteria are explicitly cited or can be reasonably inferred from the team's response.
- 2 Points — At least two of the criteria are explicitly cited in the team's response, or can be reasonably inferred.
- 3 Points — All three criteria are in strong evidence and are explicitly cited in the team's response.

**Question****Rating Definition****Score**

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. What are the capacities or assets within your district that support the provision of a quality education to all students in an inclusive school community? Please describe any current district-wide strategic planning and action initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the district have a stated mission?</li><li>• Have district-wide visions and values been articulated?</li><li>• If yes, how were the mission, vision, and values developed?</li><li>• Who was involved in this process?</li><li>• Does the current district mission, vision, and values reflect and include a commitment to supporting students with disabilities in their neighborhood schools and general education classrooms with the supports and services needed to enhance their membership, active participation, and learning?</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commitment — is there openness, belief in, or a strong desire for inclusion among staff and administrators in the school or district?</li><li>• Experience — does the response indicate prior success with inclusion and practical experience in its implementation?</li><li>• Talent and leadership — response indicates exceptional, well-trained teaching staff, and strong leadership by administrators.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| <p>2. Please describe the current placement and support provided for students of all ages with disabilities in your district. What types of placement are utilized in your district (e.g., self-contained classrooms, resource rooms, general education classrooms with support, etc.) and for whom?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarity and specificity — placement and support is clearly outlined across ages and disabilities.</li><li>• Breadth of understanding — response indicates the supports provided across diverse needs.</li><li>• Systems thinking — response indicates multiple facets included in decision making for placement and support.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| <p>3. What changes would you like to accomplish in your district as a result of your participation in the District Partnership Program? Please respond to this question by reviewing your current status as described in questions 1 (attention to inclusion in district-wide initiatives) and 2 (placement and support). Please describe at least three targets that you feel would best support your efforts to build a more inclusive school community.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarity and specificity — 3 changes desired are specifically stated.</li><li>• Systems thinking — changes desired reflect an appreciation of the systems level, as opposed to classroom level, changes that need to occur to build an inclusive school community (e.g., "change in the structure and delivery of special services" instead of "more classroom support").</li><li>• Linkage to district initiative — changes desired have a direct and obvious relationship to inclusion at a district-wide level and other related initiatives (i.e., general education initiatives such as OBE, site-based management).</li></ul> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 50px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |

**Question****Rating Definition****Score**

4. What are the most significant barriers to change and/or challenges that face your district in order to expand upon your efforts to build a more inclusive school community?

- Breadth of understanding — response indicates team appreciation of the breadth of factors such as culture, attitudes, beliefs, structures, processes, training, leadership, collaboration, participation, financial or physical resources, etc.
- Depth of understanding — team response indicates more than a superficial appreciation of needs or challenges by more in-depth discussion.
- Systems thinking — team response indicates some appreciation of the "systems" nature (i.e. interrelationships, dependencies, etc., of the various needs or challenges facing them in building an inclusive school community).

5. What will your district be able to contribute (financial, leadership, consultative, etc.) toward overcoming the barriers and advancing the changes you have identified?

- Clarity and specificity — district contributions are specifically stated.
- Commitment — response reinforces a strong desire or belief in inclusion among school members.
- Contribution — response outlines at least one method for contributing to the changes outlined in the proposal.

**Total  
Score**

**Additional Comments:**

# Appendix B

## District B Values and Vision

### Values

We, the members of this learning community believe —

- Everyone has unique worth and gifts to contribute to the community.
- Learning is a lifelong process and all people can learn in their own way given the opportunity.
- The diversity of people is welcomed and valued.
- Valuing others creates friendships that make people feel good.
- Challenges can be met successfully when people work together, learn from and support each other.
- A safe environment fosters a school community where learning can occur and people are treated with fairness and respect.
- People have a right to fair treatment and equal opportunity to learn.

### Vision

We, the members of this learning community envision —

- A safe learning environment that will generate respectful and caring attitudes.
  - We will support and appreciate each other by accepting diversity of all members.
  - We will nurture each individual to enhance positive self-esteem.
- School staff, students, families and community working in partnership for school and district-wide improvement.
  - There will be opportunities for participation by all members.
  - All members will be empowered to affect decision making.
- School communities where all learners are supported in their education.
  - Curriculum that nurtures all learners and supports their unique needs and strengths.
  - A variety of instructional strategies and methods is utilized in order to maximize each learner's potential and enjoyment of learning.
  - All members (students, staff, parents, and community) are recognized as learners and are provided the supports to improve and grow as community members.

# Appendix C

## Processing Summaries

These processing summaries are organized into sections, using some of the change lessons identified by Michael Fullan [see Fullan, M. (1991)].

# Together We're Better (TWB) Year 1, 1992-93 Process Notes Summary

## Overview

Process notes were taken at TWB staff processing meetings. These were held approximately once each month. The purposes of these meetings were to —

- Review project activities in each district.
- Identify barriers to project activities.
- Evaluate strategies.
- Summarize "learnings".

Although these purposes were used to organize discussion at some meetings, discussion did not always focus on these purposes. The original notes from processing meetings are attached to this summary for purposes of reference for TWB project staff.

The purposes noted above are used as an organizational framework for this summary of process notes. This summary does not identify districts. Necessarily, however, individual district contexts have a significant impact and are reflected to that extent in these notes.

## Review of Project Activities

The formation of core planning teams and initiation of district meetings started systematically in January, 1993. In one district, meetings were held on ten different days, comprising seven meetings. In the other district, meetings were held on five different days, comprising five meetings.

The original goals of Year 1 activities in the two districts were similar — develop a district vision, set up building level structures, analyze district barriers and strengths, identify district inclusion objectives, and develop specific plan for reaching objectives. As would be expected, progress toward these goals varied in the two districts. Although the two districts engaged in about the same number of activities during the course of the year, the focus of activities was quite different. A brief synopsis of the major events in the districts is presented in the following table.

| District 1                              | District 2                                 |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Discussion of definition of "inclusion" | MAPS activity                              |
| MAPS activity                           | Formation of 2 groups — Change, Assessment |
| Inclusion/Exclusion exercise            | Building-level focus groups formed         |
| Education Systems Planning activity     | Two groups merged                          |
| Objectives identification               | Change survey conducted                    |
| Building Level Team (BLT) meetings      | Survey results reviewed                    |
| Vision and Values definition            | Vision and Values definition started       |
| Define goals for beginning of Year 2    |                                            |

Other major district events that have occurred and could potentially have had an impact include such things as change in superintendent, other personnel changes (particularly changes in principals), lawsuits, and district plans. The perception is that these changes have either had a minimal impact or have had a positive impact.

## Barriers

**(Watch for big problems. They disguise big opportunities.)**

Barriers represent challenges to the successful attainment of the project goals. These can be related to people, policy, practices, and attitudes. The major barriers to inclusion and the successful completion of TWB goals that were identified during the first year included the following —

- Restricted and different views of the meaning of inclusion and the purpose of the project.
- Other major initiatives or concerns in the district (e.g., lawsuit, staff changes).
- Desire of district people to move very quickly — action-orientation rather than process orientation.
- Belief that everything is fine (it is difficult to get significant change when there is not a belief that change is needed).
- Staff time — time is limited and there are many demands on each individual's time. It is very difficult to get a consistent set of people together to meet.
- Difficulty in taking ownership of change process. It is always easier to assume someone else will do it.

## Strategies

**(Never underestimate the power of a kind word or deed.)**

Strategies reflect approaches that were identified following an unsuccessful experience (what could have been done differently?) or after a very successful experience (remember this because it really worked). The major strategies that were identified during the first year included the following —

- Start slow in order to begin to build trust. Save activities that might be viewed as threatening for later. The time it takes probably will be worth it in the long run.
- Get as much knowledge as possible about the district before going in to meet with staff for the first time.
- Prepare the district "leader" before meeting with a larger group (provide the person with possible definition, rationales for project, etc.).
- Use ice-breakers to start initial meetings, even in groups where people know each other. It eases tensions about the activities to follow.
- The views of students are very persuasive. Perhaps have team members talk to students early in project. Or, bring in statements students have made in other districts.
- Push toward having selected team members assume role of liaison to their buildings. This is critical for communications, activity completion, etc.
- Networking with people prior to meeting (or other activity such as conducting a survey) sets up an expectation and interest level that helps turnout and/or cooperation.

- Have team members help set agenda for meetings — and probably do this at each meeting for the next meeting.
- It helps to have concrete examples of things when progress is especially slow (e.g., example of product of one district spurs thoughts about what to do in other district).
- There are almost always going to be unanticipated complications that make it difficult to implement a project as planned. Recognize this and move forward.
- Two people at the same meeting can view and interpret the occurrences at the meeting in very different ways. This confirms the importance of debriefing after each meeting.

## Learnings

**(Change is a journey, not a blueprint.)**

“Learnings” represent general findings that are broader than the strategies previously identified. They reflect basic background concepts that change efforts should be aware of as strategies are planned —

- The size of the core planning team is important. The group must not be too big.
- A group may have members with several different agendas. To the extent possible, these agendas should be understood, or at least recognized, before the meeting starts.
- The tone of the team can be changed dramatically by the exit or entrance of a single person.
- Key concepts (such as inclusion) will be understood differently by different team members and others, even if they are defined for them. It is important to continue to talk about the meaning of the key concepts.
- Repeated clarification of purpose (e.g., to build a vision statement) is a good idea. Team members have many different responsibilities and it is easy to lose sight of a “purpose” within an array of competing activities.
- Leadership commitment is critical, particularly during start-up and times of confusion.
- There are many more barriers to change and fewer avenues to overcome them in the secondary-level schools.
- It takes a lot of time to actually do the activities required for planning (at least a couple of months). It is a frustrating experience for many. It can be eased somewhat if there is a structure in place for planning in the district (e.g., need to develop district 5-year plan) and if the leadership supports the approach. It will be critical to address how to ensure that adequate planning and goal setting takes place in districts that do not have this type of structural and leadership support in place.
- Dissemination of information by the planning team contributes to team member buy-in as well as making others aware of activities. The involvement of team members is a critical aspect of this because it helps to clarify their understanding of purpose, goals, etc.
- Some of the greatest “learnings” occur over lunch, or at other times of relaxation when casual conversation is occurring.

# Together We're Better (TWB) Year 2, 1993-1994 Process Notes Summary

## Overview

Process notes were taken at TWB staff processing meetings. These were held approximately once each month. The purposes of these meetings were to —

- Review project activities in each district.
- Identify barriers to project activities.
- Evaluate strategies.
- Summarize "learnings".

Although these purposes were used to organize discussion at some meetings, discussion did not always focus on these purposes. The original notes from processing meetings are attached to this summary for purposes of reference for TWB project staff.

The purposes noted above are used as an organizational framework for this summary of process notes. This summary does not identify districts. Necessarily, however, individual district contexts have a significant impact and are reflected to that extent in these notes.

## Review of Project Activities

The 1993-1994 school year was the second year in which two districts were involved in the project. Meetings of the core planning teams in each of the districts continued during this second year. In one district, meetings were held on ten different days, comprising six meetings. In the other district, meetings were held on six different days, also comprising six meetings.

The original goals for Year 2 activities in the two districts were to continue work toward building inclusive school communities. The two districts had ended Year 1 (1992-1993) at somewhat different points, but hoped to progress to a point where both would be ready to continue activities during the third year with significantly less support from the project's staff. As would have been predicted, however, the districts ended at points consistent with where they started: one district was farther along than the other. A brief synopsis of the major events in the district is presented in the following table.

| District 1                         | District 2                         |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Issues analysis                    | Vision building                    |
| Generation of need statement       | Issues analysis                    |
| Presentation                       | Generation of goals and objectives |
| Generation of goals and activities |                                    |

Other district events that occurred during the second year could have had an impact on the progress of the project. These included a referendum failure, new district leadership, and lawsuits. The perception was that these events did have some negative effects on the progress toward inclusive school communities.

## Barriers

**(Watch for big problems. They disguise big opportunities.)**

Barriers represent challenges to the successful attainment of the project goals. These can be related to people, policy, practices, and attitudes. The major barriers to inclusion and the successful completion of TWB goals that were identified during the second year included the following —

- Lack of trust and/or failure to build trust over time.
- Focus on disseminating the inclusion message rather than building real support for the inclusion vision.
- The beginning of the year is a difficult time to restart an activity from the previous year.
- Primary issues to address that are identified by core planning teams are (1) planning time, and (2) staff development.
- Distrust of non-educators.
- Belief that other commitments are more important than the commitment to developing a vision and plan for inclusive education.

## Strategies

**(Never underestimate the power of a kind word or deed.)**

Strategies reflect approaches that were identified following an unsuccessful experience (what could have been done differently?) or after a very successful experience (remember this because it really worked). The major strategies that were identified during the second year included the following —

- It probably would be very advantageous for the core planning team and perhaps the building teams to get together once during the summer so it is not so difficult to start up again in the fall.
- It is critical to identify who should be on the core planning team, with special attention to roles like principals, school board member, and superintendent.
- Increasing understanding and building ownership are facilitated by having district people publicly describe how they are making inclusion work.
- Information that is given to school districts and schools needs to be summarized into briefs or short presentations.

## Learnings

(Change is a journey, not a blueprint.)

"Learnings" represent general findings that are broader than the strategies previously identified. They reflect basic background concepts that those involved in change efforts should be aware of as strategies are planned. The major learnings that were identified during the second year included the following —

- It is useful to have planning teams think in advance about what it will take to maintain the project's work after the support is gone.
- Good leadership is a key to staying on track toward goals.
- Asking district members to give a speech or participate in a panel focusing on how they are making inclusion work in their district does much to help the "making it work" actually move forward.
- It is important to explain why certain activities are conducted. For example, before setting up action teams, it is important to talk about group functioning.

# Together We're Better (TWB) Year 3, 1994-95 Process Notes Summary

## Overview

Process notes were taken at TWB staff processing meetings. These were held approximately once each month. The purposes of these meetings were to —

- Review project activities in each district.
- Identify barriers to project activities.
- Evaluate strategies.
- Summarize "learnings".

Although these purposes were used to organize discussion at some meetings, discussion did not always focus on these purposes. The original notes from processing meetings are attached to this summary for purposes of reference for TWB project staff.

The purposes noted above are used as an organizational framework for this summary of process notes. This summary does not identify districts. Necessarily, however, individual district contexts have a significant impact and are reflected to that extent in these notes.

## Review of Project Activities

The 1994-1995 school year was the year during which two new districts were added to the targeted districts for the project. It was the third year for the two districts originally involved in the project. Meetings of the core planning teams were held in each of the districts. In one district, meetings were held on seven different days, comprising six meetings. In another district, meetings were held on four different days, comprising four meetings. In one of the two new districts, meetings were held on eight different days, comprising seven meetings, with one being a teleconference meeting. In the other new district, meetings were held on eleven different days, comprising ten meetings, with five of these being teleconference meetings.

The original goals for Year 3 activities in the two original districts were to continue to work toward building inclusive school communities, but at the same time to reduce the direct involvement of the University project people so the districts would be able to continue activities with significantly less support from the project's staff. For each of the two new districts, the goal was to develop a district vision, set up structures for working toward the vision, analyze district barriers and strengths, identify district inclusion objectives, and develop specific plans for reaching objectives. A brief synopsis of the major events in the districts is presented in the following table.

| District 1                                   | District 2                    |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Action team planning                         | Issues analysis               |
| Bringing mission, vision, and values to life | Generation of needs statement |
|                                              | Goal setting                  |
|                                              | Action teams                  |

### District 3

Review existing mission, etc.  
Bringing mission, vision, and values to life  
Community expectations  
Smart goals and strategies

### District 4

Action plan  
Goal setting  
Team building  
Community expectations  
MAPS

## Barriers

**(Watch for big problems. They disguise big opportunities.)**

Barriers represent challenges to the successful attainment of the project goals. These can be related to people, policy, practices, and attitudes. The major barriers to inclusion and the successful completion of TWB goals that were identified during the third year included the following —

- Insufficient time to do all that would like to do.
- Concern about self-preservation rather than working through disagreements.
- Global thinking that does not give way to specific planning and action.
- Failure of team members to carry through on their assigned tasks.

## Strategies

**(Never underestimate the power of a kind word or deed.)**

Strategies reflect approaches that were identified following an unsuccessful experience (what could have been done differently?) or after a very successful experience (remember this because it really worked). The major strategies that were identified during the third year included the following —

- It helps for people to be able to see what has been said. Use of large sheets of paper to record main points discussed or agreements reached is a good idea.
- Breaking a large group into smaller groups can dramatically increase participation of all individuals. The key is to have small groups report back in a way that all others listen.
- Start with the philosophy that it is important to understand (i.e., you listen to others) rather than to be understood (i.e., have others listen to you).
- Collaborative planning time is a critical element of developing inclusive schools, yet it is very difficult for schools to build this in. One way to make sure it happens, within the context of state money flowing into districts, is to make an agreement to provide collaborative planning time a part of the grant process agreement.

## Learnings

**(Change is a journey, not a blueprint.)**

"Learnings" represent general findings that are broader than the strategies previously identified. They reflect basic background concepts that those involved in change efforts should be aware of as strategies are planned. The major learnings that were identified during the third year included the following —

- Communication is a key to success. It is important to take time to ensure that good communication is occurring. One part of this is taking some time to agree on what was said. Another part is to attend to the philosophy of good communication (e.g., creating the right atmosphere) as well as specific techniques.
- When schools are working on systemic change, it is critical that their focus ties into the district's vision.
- When people are asked to act as facilitators, they may not have the skills needed to do this. It helps to give leaders materials that will assist them in being successful in their facilitation attempts.
- Recognition is very important. Having the work of the core planning team recognized helps to maintain the motivation of those on the team.

# Together We're Better (TWB) Year 4, 1995-96 Process Notes Summary

## Overview

Process notes were taken at TWB staff processing meetings. These were held approximately once each month. The purposes of these meetings were to —

- Review project activities in each district.
- Identify barriers to project activities.
- Evaluate strategies.
- Summarize "learnings".

Although these purposes were used to organize discussion at some meetings, discussion did not always focus on these purposes. The original notes from processing meetings are attached to this summary for purposes of reference for TWB project staff.

The purposes noted above are used as an organizational framework for this summary of process notes. This summary does not identify districts. Necessarily, however, individual district contexts have a significant impact and are reflected to that extent in these notes.

## Review of Project Activities

The 1995-1996 school year was the final year of the TWB project. It was the fourth year for the two districts originally involved in the project, and the second year for the two new districts. Meetings of the core planning teams in each of the districts were held on varied schedules because the project was winding down. In one of the four-year districts, meetings were held on three different days. In the other older district, meetings were held on two different days, comprising one meeting. In one of the two new districts, meetings were held on eight different days, comprising seven meetings. In the other new district, meetings were held on five different days, comprising five meetings.

The original goals for Year 4 activities in the two original districts were to decrease the involvement of TWB consulting staff from the University, and to enable districts to establish their own means of continuing to work toward building inclusive school communities. For each of the two new districts, the goal was to continue to develop a district vision, setting up structures for working toward the vision, and to develop specific plans for reaching objectives. A brief synopsis of the major events in the districts is presented in the following table.

| District 1                               | District 2                                            |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Relating roles to vision                 | Making decisions based on vision, mission, and values |
| Continuing beyond TWB funding            | High school inclusion                                 |
| History of TWB in district Impact Survey | Impact evaluation                                     |
| Futures planning                         | Closure                                               |

| District 3        | District 4        |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Goal setting      | Vision statement  |
| Impact evaluation | Large-scale event |
| Futures planning  | Futures planning  |

## Barriers

**(Watch for big problems. They disguise big opportunities.)**

Barriers represent challenges to the successful attainment of the project goals. These can be related to people, policy, practices, and attitudes. The major barriers to inclusion and the successful completion of TWB goals that were identified during the fourth year included the following —

- Vocal, negative parents, who seem to be against innovation in schools.
- Individual issues (e.g., problem encountered by one team member) are a challenge to system change efforts that are focused on other issues.
- Budget cuts take the steam away from change efforts.

## Strategies

**(Never underestimate the power of a kind word or deed.)**

Strategies reflect approaches that were identified following an unsuccessful experience (what could have been done differently?) or after a very successful experience (remember this because it really worked). The major strategies that were identified during the fourth year included the following —

- If an individual team member's needs threaten the system change focus, bring those needs up for the larger group to address (but not necessarily to solve).

- High school students can, and should, be involved in the school change process.
- Involving businesses is an effective way to show how teams work — as long as the teams gets the "right" business people involved (ones who have worked with teachers before).

## Learnings

**(Change is a journey, not a blueprint.)**

"Learnings" represent general findings that are broader than the strategies previously identified. They reflect basic background concepts that those involved in change efforts should be aware of as strategies are planned. The major learnings that were identified during the fourth year included the following —

- Negative attitudes can reflect both not liking something and not understanding it.
- Time, experience, and success are ingredients that promote ownership of system change efforts.
- A good facilitator contributes to successful meetings, but more important, is establishing norms for how the group works and how capacity is built.
- The history of a group of people in working with a district makes a difference in how ideas are received and/or generated by the group.
- Different perspectives do not necessarily reflect different levels of commitment.
- Relationships are the bedrock of building community.

# Appendix D

## District A Survey Results

District A surveyed both employees and parents. Because this school district was one of the first two to join the TWB systems change project, the data collected through the surveys were available for the beginning of the project (Baseline) and after four years (Current).

### Parent Data

Summarized in the table below are only those data on the percentages of parents indicating that the practices were considered to be internalized or AUTOMATIC or DEVELOPING.

These data indicate dramatic differences between perceptions of parents over the two years. However, since there were data from only four parents, these percentages must be viewed with caution.

| Statement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Baseline | Current |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------|
| <b>We envision a . . .</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |          |         |
| learning environment that serves the specific needs of all learners through the implementation of a personalized learning plan. In this environment, all people feel like they belong, and there is respect for and a celebration of diversity. Learners get along, help each other, and resolve conflicts constructively.                                                                       | 0.0      | 100.0   |
| learning community where collaboration takes place among school board members and employees, students, parents, and other community members. Through ongoing staff development and support, and adequate time for planning, everyone works as a team to assist all learners to develop the skills and abilities needed for productive citizenship and life-long learning.                        | 33.3     | 100.0   |
| learning environment where students often work in smaller, flexible groups with an array of support, and appropriate student/teacher ratios. Curriculum will be integrated and instruction will be personalized utilizing a wide range of material resources and technology to stimulate the learning of all. Wherever possible, we will eliminate labels that exclude people or limit learning. | 0.0      | 100.0   |

## Employee Data

Summarized in the table below are only those data on the percentages of employees indicating that the same practices as those rated by parents were considered to be internalized or AUTOMATIC or DEVELOPING.

These data indicate dramatic differences between perceptions of employees over the two years. Since they are based on data from nearly 150 employees during baseline and more than 200 current employees, these percentages can be viewed with some confidence.

| Statement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Baseline | Current |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------|
| <b>We envision a . . .</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |          |         |
| learning environment that serves the specific needs of all learners through the implementation of a personalized learning plan. In this environment, all people feel like they belong, and there is respect for and a celebration of diversity. Learners get along, help each other, and resolve conflicts constructively.                                                                       | 25.4     | 90.9    |
| learning community where collaboration takes place among school board members and employees, students, parents, and other community members. Through ongoing staff development and support, and adequate time for planning, everyone works as a team to assist all learners to develop the skills and abilities needed for productive citizenship and life long learning.                        | 27.2     | 70.1    |
| learning environment where students often work in smaller, flexible groups with an array of support, and appropriate student/teacher ratios. Curriculum will be integrated and instruction will be personalized utilizing a wide range of material resources and technology to stimulate the learning of all. Wherever possible, we will eliminate labels that exclude people or limit learning. | 29.7     | 74.4    |

## Appendix E

### District C Survey Results

District C surveyed students. Because this school district was one of the last two to join the Together We're Better (TWB) systems change project, the data collected through the surveys were considered to be baseline data.

### Student Data

Summarized below are only those data on how accepting students are of others with various characteristics. The characteristics are listed here, with the percentages of students indicating that they are (a) never or rarely accepting, (b) sometimes accepting, or (c) always or usually accepting.

These data indicate that, in general, students in District C were generally accepting of students with various characteristics. However, the three types of students most likely not to be accepted were: (a) those who are mentally handicapped, (b) those who are emotionally/behaviorally disordered (EBD), and (c) those who have a different culture or language.

| How accepting are you of others who . . .           | Never or<br>Rarely | Sometimes | Always or<br>Usually |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| are racially different.                             | 8.8                | 21.6      | 81.5                 |
| have a different culture or language.               | 10.2               | 10.2      | 78.1                 |
| are of the opposite sex.                            | 2.7                | 3.0       | 94.3                 |
| are good students (high performing).                | 6.0                | 10.3      | 83.7                 |
| are struggling students (low performing).           | 7.1                | 14.7      | 78.3                 |
| are not successful in co-curricular activities.     | 5.7                | 14.7      | 79.5                 |
| are mentally handicapped.                           | 13.6               | 19.9      | 66.5                 |
| are physically handicapped.                         | 9.8                | 18.6      | 71.6                 |
| appear to be rich.                                  | 8.1                | 15.8      | 76.1                 |
| appear to be poor.                                  | 5.6                | 13.5      | 80.9                 |
| have a learning disability (receive academic help). | 8.3                | 15.4      | 76.3                 |
| are emotionally/behaviorally disordered (EBD).      | 12.6               | 18.2      | 69.2                 |
| have a different religion.                          | 5.9                | 7.5       | 86.6                 |

## Employee Data

Summarized here are only those data on concerns about teamwork. The statements to which employees responded are listed here, with the percentages of employees indicating that they are (a) not at all (1 or 2 rating), (b) very much (4 or 5 rating), or (c) uncommitted or don't know (3 or 6 rating).

These data indicate that, in general, the employees in District C were generally quite comfortable in their interactions with students. In contrast, they express much less confidence in relation to working with other adults, particularly in relation to problem solving and resolving conflicts. Their greatest lack of comfort was expressed in relation to their knowledge about community learning resources and sites.

| Statement                                                                                                                                                                           | Not At All | Don't Know | Very Much |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| I am comfortable working with students who have a variety of learning and behavioral needs.                                                                                         | 4.6        | 9.7        | 85.7      |
| I know different models of behavior management that help me teach students with a range of abilities.                                                                               | 6.4        | 7.9        | 85.7      |
| I am trained in different instructional strategies that help me teach students with a range of abilities.                                                                           | 13.4       | 11.9       | 74.6      |
| I am/would be comfortable regularly working in a team to meet the needs of students with a variety of learning and behavioral needs.                                                | 5.9        | 7.9        | 86.2      |
| I believe it's OK to not be the expert on everything and to learn from other team members.                                                                                          | 1.0        | 1.5        | 97.5      |
| I am concerned about having enough time to organize myself/my team to teach students who have a variety of learning and behavioral needs.                                           | 4.5        | 6.4        | 89.1      |
| I know how to manage/coordinate other adults and am comfortable in doing so.                                                                                                        | 11.0       | 21.4       | 67.7      |
| I know how to effectively organize a team of adults with different strengths and skills to maximize learning of a group of students with a range of abilities and behavioral needs. | 20.8       | 36.7       | 42.6      |

54

| Statement                                                           | Not At All | Don't Know | Very Much |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>I am comfortable with my knowledge and skills in...</b>          |            |            |           |
| ways to build consensus in a team.                                  | 16.3       | 29.5       | 54.2      |
| problem solving strategies in a team.                               | 11.9       | 21.3       | 66.9      |
| techniques to resolve conflicts.                                    | 12.9       | 23.3       | 63.9      |
| decision-making skills.                                             | 10.0       | 14.4       | 75.6      |
| listening and interpersonal communication.                          | 3.0        | 9.4        | 87.7      |
| facilitating productive meetings.                                   | 15.9       | 21.8       | 62.4      |
| cooperative learning strategies.                                    | 9.4        | 17.8       | 72.8      |
| involving parents in their child's learning.                        | 9.4        | 19.7       | 70.9      |
| community learning resources and sites.                             | 26.8       | 30.2       | 43.1      |
| group action planning to meet goals.                                | 12.8       | 27.5       | 59.8      |
| models of different ways a group of adults can deliver instruction. | 17.7       | 24.6       | 57.6      |
| setting goals based on a shared team vision.                        | 11.4       | 17.3       | 71.3      |

## Appendix F

### Students Surveyed About Inclusion

Crookston Central High School began focusing on improving the inclusion of all learners in all learning environments during the 1994-95 school year. One of the first tasks was to develop and distribute a survey to students in grades 9-12. The survey asked the following five questions —

- What does it mean to belong?
- Do you think you belong at this school?
- What are the signs of not belonging?
- How does negative peer pressure affect you?
- Who has power or influence over you?

The survey also asked students to self-judge their acceptance of others' differences, such as race, sex, performance, social economic status, and religion.

### Survey Results

The survey results show the following —

- 61% define "belonging" to include feeling comfortable.
- 78% of the students think they belong at Crookston High School.
- 26% include having friends as a sign of belonging.
- 38% expressed being affected by negative peer pressure.
- 29% of the students said that their parents had power to influence them.

Students judged themselves as least accepting of others with mental and physical disabilities (26% & 20% reported they were non-accepting). The next level of non-acceptance were of students with emotional/behavior problems and those who appear to be rich or poor (13%, 10%, 13% reported non-acceptance).

# **Appendix G**

## **Crookston High School Student Focus Group Report: Large-Scale School Change Event**

### **Introduction**

In 1994 Crookston Central High School applied for a grant with the Together We're Better (TWB) project at the University of Minnesota (U of M). TWB assists a school in identifying issues related to inclusion of students with severe or multiple disabilities in the context of systemic school change. Crookston High was accepted to begin working with program coordinators during the 1994-95 school year. John Sauer and Lynn Walz were assigned to work with Crookston. During the fall of 1994, the contact consisted of interactive television (ITV) planning sessions. During these sessions, participants were selected from the high school staff and Crookston community to participate on the inclusion core planning team. This team would identify issues concerning full participation of students with severe or multiple disabilities in grades 9-12 at Crookston.

The remainder of the 1994-95 school year was devoted to gathering data and defining the issues. By the 1995-96 school year, a major effort has been directed at large-scale systemic change. In preparation for a Real Time Strategic Change event, an action plan was developed to interview student groups to discuss the following: students' desired changes, which students should represent the stu-

dent body at the large-scale event, and how to organize the event so that students would have a true voice and their interests be heard by the adults.

### **Description**

On April 1, 1996, 14 students from Crookston High were trained to be focus group moderators and assistant moderators, and on the components and purpose of focus groups. The students were selected by staff from Crookston. The training was provided by a program coordinator (Lynn Walz) of the TWB project. On the first day of training, the students learned about the characteristics of focus groups, the duties of a moderator and assistant moderator, how to begin a discussion group, and they evaluated/revised the questions to be used in the discussion of school change event. Students were asked to identify their desire to be a moderator or assistant moderator and on which topic they would like to lead a discussion the next day. Students were assigned homework of writing an introduction for a focus group including welcome, purpose for the selection of participants, ground rules for the group, and the first discussion question.

The agenda was modified that evening and the training continued on Tuesday, April 2. The second day began with students practicing their focus group introduction with a partner. Half of the student moderators then sat around a table and the other half sat away from the table observing, while the presenter led a five minute discussion on the first topic of inclusion/exclusion, using the questions revised the day before. The students at the table discussed the topic while the students away from the table practiced taking notes as an assistant moderator. The topic was changed to the school change event questions and students re-

versed positions, allowing all students to practice the role of assistant moderator.

The student moderators were assigned partners by the presenter and Crookston school teacher. The student moderators were asked to assign the participants to discussion groups and decide on seating arrangements for the groups; they did this considering guidelines for group participation in focus group interviews. Participants were students in grades 9–11 who were enrolled in required courses to promote a cross-section of the student body. Participating students came from Biology (10th grade), Composition (11th grade), Algebra (mixed grades, mostly 9th), and Advanced Foods (mixed grades). Groups were assigned to discuss one of two topics: (a) inclusion at the high school or (b) the school change event. In total, there were 11 discussion groups (the one 8th grade group was unavailable because of statewide testing). Six to eight students were assigned to each discussion group, but because of absent students, the groups had four to seven participants. Focus groups were allowed 45 minutes for discussion, but the discussions lasted from 20–40 minutes.

Student moderators were allowed 50 minutes for lunch; Crookston has an open campus policy so most students left the grounds for lunch. Upon return from lunch, two of the student moderators were absent, one had become ill and the other was one hour late in arriving at the work room.

The presenter and Crookston teacher wrote the report introduction. As a group, the student moderators outlined the "Description" of the process. In two groups, the moderators analyzed the data and wrote the *Findings* section of this report. (See page 57 for names of report authors.) After an hour of data analysis, the moderators identified themes from the discussions and designed suggestions for action related to the topic.

Finally, the moderators and presenter determined who would need the report, in what format, by what date, and which moderators would assume responsibility for that reporting. The process was completed by 3:00 p.m. on April 2. This report has been edited and finalized by the presenter.

## Findings

### The best thing about Crookston High School is . . .

The things people liked about Crookston High School were the wide variety of electives and extracurricular activities offered along with the post-secondary enrollment option. Others included music, Leo Club, open lunch, and open hours for juniors and seniors. People also enjoy the fact that the school is small enough to allow you to know your fellow classmates.

### What should remain the same

Students felt the following should remain the same: discipline policies, sports and activities, teacher/student relations, elective choices, open lunch, open hours for juniors and seniors, and keeping the vending machines on. They strongly felt that they should keep the seven-period day instead of the four-period day that is being discussed.

### Ideas for improving the quality of learning

Some ideas that the students came up with were to create a better learning atmosphere by making it easier to talk to teachers, and have more group activities with more hands-on than text books. They wanted to include more languages, a drama program, and incorporate computers in curricula. They wanted to have stricter rules focusing on skipping school and keeping people out of school who don't want to participate in learning.

### **Things that would improve school**

Students thought some important ideas would be having respect for the building by not littering the hallways, and keeping facilities clean. Other comments students had were to have a commons area, doors on bathroom stalls, a smoking room, more food in the lunch line, and provide good lighting in the new school. They also believed that positive attitudes from the students would contribute to a warmer environment. Also, when absent students should be allowed to complete assignments at home with prior approval.

### **How to organize the large scale event so students have a voice**

Students believed that the representatives should be known by the student body, and it was brought up that these students would elect a leader to speak for them or elect a number of representatives from the 80 students. Comfort was also an issue, so ideas in this area included sitting with people you know, having leaders that would make *everyone* feel comfortable, having a clear itinerary to know exactly what is going on, and perhaps splitting up the large group into smaller groups so there are not 250 people in one room. It was also said that they should stay on-task and work together.

### **Name students to represent students at the large scale event?**

The 28 students suggested are as follows\* —

Andy  
Eric  
Phil  
Stacey  
Jenny  
Steph  
Sara  
Dustin  
Jessaica  
Annie  
Tanya  
Krystal  
Anne  
Sheyna  
Elizabeth  
Nicole  
Jason  
Chris  
Nate  
Brock  
Kristen  
Lori  
Eric  
Ryan  
Kristi  
Maria  
Maura  
Tim

\*Note: Last names omitted here.

## Themes

- We need more RESPECT!! (Cleanliness).
- Varieties in school. (Extra-curricular activities, electives, sports, music, clubs (Leo).
- New technology and equipment.
- Students getting adequate representation at the large scale event.
- Smaller classes with better student-teacher relationships.
- Keep open hours and open lunches available for all students.

## This Report is respectfully submitted by:

Ms. Kathy Bakken-Dryden, English  
Ms. Lynn Walz, U of M  
Eric, Grade 11  
Stephanie, Grade 11  
Annie, Grade 11  
Megan, Grade 11  
Lori, Grade 11  
Maura, Grade 11  
Tim, Grade 11  
Sandra, Grade 9

\*Note: Last names of students omitted here.

## Suggestions

- A variety of students should be involved in the planning of the new school.
- There should be further discussion involving students about when to move to the new school.
- Students should be involved on the core planning team.
- Students should be more informed about the four period day school plan.
- Cleanliness at the new school is a must (such as bathrooms, hallways, classrooms, etc.).
- There should be a positive learning environment in the new school building.
- Keep open lunch and open hours for juniors and seniors.
- New technology, new labs, and more hands-on experience in industrial arts and sciences should be included in the curriculum.

# Appendix H

## Crookston High School Student Focus Group Report: Inclusion/Exclusion

### Introduction

In 1994, Crookston Central High School applied for a grant with the Together We're Better (TWB) project at the University of Minnesota (U of M). TWB assists a school in identifying issues related to inclusion of students with severe or multiple disabilities in the context of systemic school change. Crookston High was accepted to begin working with program coordinators during the 1994-95 school year. John Sauer and Lynn Walz were assigned to work with Crookston. During the fall of 1994, the contact consisted of interactive television (ITV) planning sessions. During these sessions participants were selected from the high school staff and Crookston community to participate on the inclusion core planning team. This team would identify issues concerning full participation of students with severe or multiple disabilities in grades 9-12 at Crookston.

The remainder of the 1994-95 school year was devoted to gathering data and defining the issues. Action plans were written and implemented in the 1995-96 school year. One of the action plans was to survey ninth graders at Crookston to discover how included they each felt and who they were willing to include into their circle of friends. The report of the

results can be obtained from an inclusion core planning team member. Two results that were identified for further inquiry were —

- One out of five students reported that they do not feel included at Crookston High School.
- One out of four students reported that students with visible disabilities would not be included into their circle of friends.

Thus, one of the topics for student focus groups was based on these findings. The questions used for the discussion are listed in the *Findings* section of this report.

### Description

On April 1, 1996, 14 students from Crookston High were trained to be focus group moderators and assistant moderators, and on the components and purpose of focus groups. The students were selected by staff from Crookston. The training was provided by a Program Coordinator (Lynn Walz) of the TWB project. The first day of training the students learned about the characteristics of focus groups, the duties of a moderator and assistant moderator, how to begin a discussion group, and they evaluated/revised the questions to be used in the discussion of inclusion/exclusion. Students were asked to identify their desire to be a moderator or assistant moderator and on which topic they would like to lead a discussion on the next day. Students were assigned homework of writing an introduction for a focus group, including welcome, purpose for the selection of participants, ground rules for the group, and the first discussion question.

6.1

The agenda was modified that evening and the training continued on Tuesday, April 2. The second day began with students practicing their focus group introduction with a partner. Half of the student moderators sat around a table and the other half sat away from the table observing while the presenter led a five minute discussion on the topics of inclusion/exclusion using the questions revised the day before. The students at the table discussed the topic while the students away from the table practiced taking notes as an assistant moderator. The topic was changed to the second issue for research, School Change Event, and students reversed positions allowing all students to practice the role of assistant moderator.

The student moderators were assigned partners by the presenter and Crookston school teacher. The student moderators were asked to assign the participants to discussion groups and decide on seating arrangements for the groups; they did this considering guidelines for group participation in focus group interviews. Participants were students in grades 9-11 who were enrolled in required courses to promote a cross-section of the student body. Participating students came from Biology (10th grade), Composition (11th grade), Algebra (mixed grades, mostly 9th), and Advanced Foods (mixed grades). Groups were assigned to discuss on of two topics: (a) inclusion at the high school or (b) the school change event. In total there were eleven discussion groups, the one eighth grade group was unavailable because of statewide testing. Six to eight students were assigned to each discussion group, but because of absent students the groups had four to seven participants.

Focus groups were allowed 45 minutes for discussion but the discussions lasted from 20-40 minutes.

Student moderators were allowed 50 minutes for lunch; Crookston has an open campus policy so most students left the grounds for lunch. Upon return from lunch, two of the student moderators were absent, one had become ill and the other was one hour late in arriving at the work room.

The presenter and Crookston teacher wrote the report introduction. As a group the student moderators outlined the "Description" of the process. In two groups the moderators analyzed the data and wrote the *Findings* section of this report. (See page 61 for names of report authors.) After an hour of data analysis, the moderators identified themes from the discussions and designed suggestions for action related to the topic.

Finally, the moderators and presenter determined who would need the report, in what format, by what date, and which moderators would assume responsibility for that reporting. The process was completed by 3:00 p.m. on April 2. This report has been edited and finalized by the presenter.

## Findings

### **The activity at school that makes me feel most included is . . .**

We made the observation that most students feel most included through extra-curricular activities and being with friends.

### **One out of five feel excluded — do you agree or disagree?**

Students said that they feel excluded because there are certain cliques and many feel they don't belong. The people in the cliques are judgmental and excluding.

**What makes a person feel included?**

If you want to be included you have to make the first effort and sign-up for things. When others reach out to you and give you compliments.

*"You exclude yourself."*

**I've felt most excluded when . . .**

The general consensus was when students didn't meet the physical standards of their classmates. Also they feel excluded when friends put them down and make them feel not wanted.

*"Someone asks others to do things and you aren't invited."*

**If a person wanted to be more included, what could they do?**

We gathered that if you want to be included, join extra-curricular activities, socialize with others, and be outgoing.

**What do student do that includes others?**

Students are friendly with others. They try to create a good atmosphere for others.

*"Some students have to drink to feel included."*

**What can adults at school do to include all students?**

Adults include students by treating them equally and putting them in groups selected by the teachers to work together in a group.

*"Teachers can look at the person as a friend not just a student."*

**One out of four would not include a person with a visible disability in their friendship group — do you agree or disagree?**

The statistic is true. It is intimidating to be around the students with disabilities.

*"Why should it matter."  
(referring to disabilities)*

**Reason for a decision to exclude others?**

People are afraid of being made fun of, and restricted by the disabilities of these students.

*"People judge people by their appearance."*

**How to influence someone to be more accepting of others?**

The general ideas were their upbringing, parents, and their surroundings. Definitely friends and religion.

*"If your friends accept someone, you most likely will, too."*

*"You are who you hang around with."*

**Can feeling included be solved?****How? Explain?**

Almost everyone says that it is a problem that will never be completely solved! It might help to have motivational speakers and teen groups.

*"You can help it, but you can't solve it!"*

*"You cannot change the way people believe."*

## Themes

- Sports/extra-curricular activities really help students to feel included.
- Cliques and put-downs from peers make students feel excluded.
- Socializing in a friendly, open manner can be a way to be included.
- When adults treat students as equals and friends, not just students, students feel more included.
- Students feel intimidated by people with disabilities.
- Parents/upbringing effect a students willingness to include people with disabilities in their friendship group.
- Students think you can help others to feel included but you can't totally solve the problem of exclusion.
- Keep extra-curricular activities and expand on the variety of them.
- Have teen support groups or motivational speakers come to talk to students.
- Challenge clubs to design a recruit process to encourage ninth graders to join.
- Ask Leo Club to specifically invite and support the participation of students with visible disabilities to the club activities or service projects.

### **This Report is respectfully submitted by**

Ms. Kathy Bakken-Dryden, English

Ms. Lynn Walz, U of M

Maria, grade 11

Eric, grade 11

Trevor, grade 11

Kristi, grade 10

Sara, grade 9

Sheyna, grade 9

\*Note: Last names of students are omitted here.

## Suggestions

- Encourage all students to take what they have and use it to the best of your ability.
- We need to know more about the one out of five 9th graders who feel excluded. They feel excluded, but do they join in school activities? Is it really a school problem or could it be the individuals' choices? Are family problems keeping the student from school involvement? Does race enter into the feeling of inclusion or exclusion? Are drugs and alcohol directly related to those who feel excluded? Why would a 9th grader choose drugs and alcohol over school involvement, what makes drugs or alcohol more appealing? Does sexual activity result from feeling included or excluded, how does this related to school involvement? This question needs more study.

## Other Together We're Better Publications. . .

### **Weaving Tapestries of Inclusion: Seven Threads to Strengthen School Membership**

*by T. Vandercook*

This booklet describes lessons learned through a multi-year research project that sought ways to weave the tapestry of educational inclusion for students with disabilities in the context of general education reform efforts. It explores seven threads of inclusion: Contribution, Commitment, Complexity, Circle of Influence, Communication, Courage/Consideration, and Collaboration. Through describing these threads and how they were found to be essential to lasting inclusion, the booklet offers a framework and direction for educators seeking to create inclusive school communities in which all students experience belonging. (1999)

### **Hey, We See It Differently!**

*by L. Walz, T. Vandercook, L. Medvitz, and M. Nelson*

This booklet summarizes the lessons learned on teaming through a collaborative process seeking to create inclusive learning environments in schools. The lessons do not align with conventional wisdom related to effective teaming, so, the authors see teaming differently! (1998)

### **A Preferred Future Worksheet: A Process for School Teams**

*by L. Medvitz, T. Vandercook, and G. Hoganson*

This worksheet and instruction guide provide a planning tool that can help teams analyze the current situation, identify a preferred future, and create a plan of action. It includes tips for forming teams and facilitating the process, as well as detailed directions for each step in developing a plan for achieving a preferred future in relation to an issue or problem. (1998)

### **Lessons for Understanding: An Elementary School Curriculum on Perspective-Taking**

*by T. Vandercook, L. Medvitz, J. Montu, P. Taylor, and K. Scalletta*

A curriculum developed for grades K-5 to increase student understanding and appreciation of different perspectives, leading to respect for diversity and support for truly inclusive school communities. The 21 lessons are clustered in four units: My Perspective, Other Perspectives, Understanding Conflict, and Working Together. The curriculum is designed to be used in classrooms where students with and without disabilities learn together, and suggested adaptations are included. A unique feature is a focus on strengthening home-school partnerships. The lessons make use of 19 storybooks available through most bookstores and libraries. (1997)

### **Lessons for Understanding: A Junior High and High School Curriculum on Perspective-Taking**

*by L. Walz, M. Nelson, and K. Scalletta*

A curriculum developed for secondary students to increase student understanding and appreciation of different perspectives, leading to respect for diversity and support for truly inclusive school communities. The 20 lessons are clustered in four units: My Perspective, Understanding Perspectives and Where They Come From, Other Perspectives, Developing Awareness of Different Perspectives, Accepting Others, Developing Skills and Attitudes for Valuing Different Perspectives, and Working Together, Applying Perspective-Taking Skills to Improve Solutions. (1998)

### **Teacher Efficacy in Heterogeneous Fifth and Sixth Grade Classrooms**

*by R. Krönberg*

A report that breaks new ground in examining teachers' in-depth descriptions of the contextual relationships between heterogeneous classrooms, teacher efficacy, and teaching and learning. This study followed four teachers, seeking to understand how they view the relationship between personal teaching efficacy and teaching and learning. (1998)

For cost and ordering information, contact the Publications Office, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota • 612-624-4512 or 612-624-9344 (fax).